

Series: The Sermon on the Mount

**Beyond the Surface**

Matthew 5:21-26, Second Corinthians 5:18-21

Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, October 5, 2025

A reading from Matthew 5, verses 21 through 26: “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 with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court, and anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of fire and hell. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them, then come and offer your gift. Settle your matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly, I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny,” the word of the Lord. You may please be seated.

Paul: Good morning, everyone. I got to tell you, I feel a little betrayed this morning. Keith, who just read for us, I found out last night, is sponsoring the Pie a Pastor booth from Keith Counseling, so that just feels a little close to home, Keith counseling. I am assuming that is because I will need counseling after today for the Pie a Pastor, and then also for those of you who are wondering, my time slot at the Pie a Pastor booth is at 1:15 p.m., but I did check my calendar, and I am going to be sick right about that time, so you will have to catch me next year or something.

I am so excited about this afternoon. Fall Festival is one of the best days at Waterstone. We just love opening our building to the community, helping people have a good encounter with the church. If you are newer here, and maybe this is one of your first Sundays with us, and maybe you are visiting with a friend so you can go to the festival, I just want to give everyone in the room a little bit of a warning. Today’s passage is really heavy, and I tried to figure out all week how I could take the bite out of this passage before we go and celebrate with caramel apples and an artisan market, and I just, I could not quite get there, and I looked at the calendar, and I was like, man, I am going to have to talk about murder on Fall Festival? Like, ugh, but here is the thing, it is that at Waterstone, we believe in the word of God, and we just always have this posture that the word of God has something to say to us, even when it is challenging, even when it is hard, and we do not want to try to pretend for some of you who might be visitors that we are something we are not, and so we always, no matter what day it is, Easter or Christmas or Fall Festival or a random Tuesday or Sunday. Tuesday, we do not do church on Tuesday. Oh my gosh, a random Sunday in the middle of February, we allow the word of God to speak to us, and so that is what we are going to do today, but I want to let you know just the passage we are stepping into. I think it has some weight to it, and I think it actually, in many ways, it is such a timely passage for the moment we find our culture in right now, because what we are going to see is that the heart of this passage, I think, has infected our culture in some really pervasive ways, and so we are going to see what Jesus has to say about that. So, I’d like to pray for us, and then we will dive in, and I will try to see if I can take us on a trajectory

where we feel good about eating caramel apples this afternoon still. All right? Does that sound good? All right, let me pray, and then we will dive in.

Heavenly Father, Lord, we come before you today, and Lord, we acknowledge that the scripture passage that Keith just read, that we read together, is challenging. It takes us to places that we might not feel comfortable, and yet, God, it is your word, and we come before you, and we open ourselves to you today. We ask that you would speak to us by the power of your Spirit and that in Jesus' name, the places within us that need to be confronted would be challenged. We also have to pray, God, that the places within us that need comfort, that through the power of your word today, we would experience your comfort as well, and it is in Christ's name we pray, amen.

All right, so by show of hands, how many of you have ever been snorkeling before? Has anyone ever been snorkeling? Okay, a lot of people. I was not sure. We live in Colorado, so I did not know if we were like all mountain people and do not like the beach, but I feel like mountain people sometimes go on vacation to the beach to get away from the mountains. We are like, we have those all the time, so my wife and I like to go on beach trips, and that was actually what we did for our honeymoon fourteen years ago. We went on a beach trip to a little island off the coast of Puerto Rico, and while we were there, she really wanted to go snorkeling. She grew up snorkeling. She loves the water. She was on the swimming team. I did not grow up in the water. I did not learn how to swim until fairly late in my childhood and had never been snorkeling before, and so on this little remote island, there was a beach that you could drive your Jeep to and go on a hike, and there was this very remote, sandy, like perfect cove where you could go snorkeling, see this beautiful coral reef and all the different fish, and she was so excited, and as we got closer and closer to this beach, I just felt like this anxiety building up within me. I am not a great swimmer. We are out in the middle of nowhere. We are young. This is like the first trip we have ever been on together. I just felt really anxious about like, is there going to be someone in the woods that is going to come out and steal my wife? Or like, I don't know, a fish is going to eat us, and then what do we do? Just all this anxiety, and so we start swimming, snorkeling, it is like picture perfect.

It is like what you could put on a postcard. It is amazing, and Steffy is just so overjoyed that we are at this place, and inside I am like, we're going to die, we're going to die, we're going to die, we're going to die, and that was the space that I was in, and so we get into the water, we start swimming around, and it was beautiful. I mean, it was like this untouched, pristine, coral reef, and there were all sorts of beautiful, colorful fish, and as I am looking at the fish, I feel that anxiety start to go away, and I just think, "Oh, man, this is really nice. Like I could get used to this," and then it all changed, because I saw at the time what I thought was a baby Kraken monster, and it turns out it was probably just like a squid or something, but I saw it, and it was like, oh, I was like, that feels a little, like I don't like that. That feels scary, like that, and I swear, this little fish is just like coming along. It was probably like this big, like in my head, and it is swimming, and I swear, I swear this to you, it turned and made eye contact with me, and then it started swimming towards me, and underwater, I let out like a blood-curdling scream, which just came out as bubbles, and I turned around as fast as I could in the water, and I swam for shore, and Steffy, who I had just sworn before God to protect with my life at our wedding, just left her completely behind, and I was like, if I swim faster than her, then I'll be safe, and I needed to get out of the water. She

comes up and just looks at me like, “What in the world just happened?” and how do you explain that you just saw a baby squid, and you freaked out? I was like, “I don’t know. I just had to get out of there.”

Here is the point of me telling you probably one of the top five most embarrassing stories of my life. It is that when you go snorkeling or when you are in the water, you can look at a beautiful coral reef, and above the water, everything looks pristine. It looks calm. It looks beautiful. Sometimes when you get underneath, there are things that might make a wimp like me a little uncomfortable, or a little frightened, or a little scary, and I think there is something in that story about what we have been going through with the Sermon on the Mount. It is because I think if you read scripture, and you read the laws of the Old Testament, where God says things like, “do not murder,” or “do not lie,” or “do not commit adultery,” you look at those, and on the surface, you think, “Yeah, good rules. If everybody did those, if we did not kill each other, if we did not sleep around with people who weren’t our spouses, if we did not lie to our coworkers and our bosses and our friends and our roommates, the world would be a better place.” What Jesus is doing in the Sermon on the Mount is He is trying to get us beneath the surface, and He is saying there is actually a heart beneath the surface of that simple law, that simple rule that God has given us, and He is trying to take us beneath the surface to something that in many ways is more beautiful and is more colorful and full of life and more vibrant, but also is going to challenge us in some ways that make us uncomfortable and that maybe even make us feel things that we wish we did not feel.

So, as we dive into the Sermon on the Mount today, we have to remember where we were last week, where we talked about this idea that Jesus said at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount that He did not come to abolish the Old Testament. He did not come to do away with the Old Testament and just say, “These rules do not apply to us anymore. There is nothing you need to learn here. There is nothing we need to follow.” He did not come to do that. Jesus says that He came to fulfill the law, and in fulfilling the law, He is trying to show us the trajectory of what the law originally intended, the heart of the law, what lies beneath the surface, and how life with Jesus helps us live that out. Then He left us with a challenge, that as followers of Jesus, our righteousness needs to surpass the most righteous followers of God, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and He says, if you want to follow after me, then your righteousness needs to get beyond just the surface of the law. It needs to go to the deeper level, because a lot of people can say, “I have never killed anyone,” but not a lot of people can say what Jesus is about to tell us.

So, He is trying to get us to go a little deeper with this idea of what it means to do life with God, and one of the questions that we have to ask ourselves as we go deeper is “What does it mean for us to have that kind of righteousness, a righteousness that surpasses the Pharisees, and then what does it mean for Jesus to fulfill the law and for us to live in that fulfilled law?” What we are going to see is over the next few weeks we are going to look at six different case studies. We are going to look at the first one today, where Jesus takes a very simple commandment from the Old Testament, and then He tries to draw a line to something beneath the surface of it to expose what that command is really about, but it is all in the effort to help us understand what it means to live a life of righteousness, to live in right relationship with each other and with God.

So, the first case study that Jesus gets into has to do with a commandment that would have been very familiar to his audience, and it is probably familiar to most of us. It is the sixth commandment, and it says this: “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago.” So, He is talking about the people

who received the Old Testament a long time ago. Jesus is talking, “You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.” Now, this is one of the original Ten Commandments. It is one of the easiest commandments that everybody knows. It would have universal approval. Like there are certain laws, even in our context today, where we can look at things, and they are open to interpretation, but everyone can agree that, yeah, not murdering is a good thing that we should all follow and that we should all practice. There are very few loopholes in a law like that, where people would debate, like, what does that really mean when it says we should not murder someone? But Jesus is again trying to get us to go beneath the surface. He is not just saying that, hey, if you have never committed murder, you are good with God, and that is all you have to do, and so He takes it to a level deeper.

He says, “So you have heard it said that you should not murder, but I tell you, I, Jesus, tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.” So, someone who commits murder is subject to judgment, but Jesus says someone who is angry at a brother or sister is also subject to the same judgment. Again, “Anyone says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’” which is another way of, I am not actually even sure if I am allowed to say this, but it is a way of saying like, idiot, okay? We have kids in the room. I want to be a little careful, but it is essentially saying, “You’re worthless. You have no value.” He says, “So if you say ‘Raca’ to a brother or a sister, you are answerable to the court, and anyone who says, ‘You fool.’” The connotation there is, if you even think in your heart that you look at someone and you think, “Oh, they are just such a fool,” then you are in danger of the fire of hell. Whew. It feels pretty intense, right? Did you feel that? That was the air getting sucked out of the room just now. It is this heavy teaching.

Now, it is important for us to understand that the word for anger in this passage is actually the same word that is used throughout all of the New Testament. It is a word that can either be neutral or negative. You can have anger that is okay, or you can have an anger that is negative and wrong and goes too far, and so Jesus is not saying here that we simply can’t get angry. What He is saying is that there is a type of anger where we go to a place of contempt, where we look at someone, and we think they have no worth, they have no value, “I want them to pay for what they have done,” we want retribution. It is that kind of anger, right? It goes to a deeper level of anger, where we look at someone, and we harbor our anger against them. We nurse it. We let it grow into this place where it is festered into bitterness, because all of us at different points in time, we have felt anger at injustice, right? We have seen something that has happened in the world to someone we love or someone we care about, or maybe even just strangers that we have never met before, and we think that is not right, and it makes us feel angry, but in this passage, what Jesus is trying to point out is that sometimes even that anger that we would consider righteous goes to a place where it crosses a line.

Theologian John Stott says this: “Righteous anger is possible, but it is exceedingly rare. Most of our anger is not righteous, but self-righteousness.” We have this way of justifying the things that we feel about other people, don’t we? We have this way of looking at the world and the injustices that we see, and if we get angry about something, and we start treating people with contempt, it is so easy to justify it, so what Jesus is saying in this passage is He is putting anger and insults and murder on the same spectrum, because they share the same common root, contempt for the image of God, and here is what I want to spell out. Jesus is doing something fascinating in this passage to try to help us understand what He is actually

teaching about anger, so we are going to start with the bottom over here on the left, where it says murder. So, Jesus says, “Do not murder. That is wrong.” All of us would nod our heads, nod along. Yes, we should not murder. That is bad, and He says, “If you murder, you actually need to go to the local county judge.” That is the system that is set up. If you commit murder, then you are going to go to the local courts, and they are going to judge you and try you based on the actions that you just committed. So, Jesus says that is a natural thing that happens in our world, “but I say to you that if you are even angry at a brother or sister,” if you have that kind of contemptuous anger in your heart for a brother or sister, “you also should go to the local county judge.”

Now let me ask you something. As you are driving along on C-470, there is someone swerving in and out of traffic, and you start to feel that anger, like, “Oh, man, they are just such an idiot. I can’t believe that that is the way they are driving. They are going to get themselves killed or get someone else killed.” How many of you guys would turn yourself in to the local county judge for that action, right? None of us, and so Jesus is drawing a parallel between this really, really violent act and having anger towards another fellow human and says that you need to go to the county judge, but then He even ups it, and He says, if you have insulted someone, if you have said, “Raca, you fool, you worthless person, there’s no good or no value in you,” then you should go before the Supreme Court, the Jewish Supreme Court. Then He says, if you have even felt in your heart this kind of contempt, then you are going to go before the throne of God for that, and He will cast judgment and try you for that.

Now, that feels really, really inverted, right? You would almost expect the kind of graph on the right, that if someone commits murder, then God would want to judge them for that, and if someone insults someone, then like, yeah, maybe you could go to court for that, like libel or something, like there are ways we could get to that, but Jesus completely flips our presuppositions about what it is to treat other people with contempt or to treat them with murder in our heart, and the question is, why? Why would Jesus do that? Because from an ethical standard, we would all agree that having like ill feelings towards someone, feelings of contempt in our heart towards someone else is not the same as taking their life, and yet Jesus ups the ante on it. He says, this is incredibly important. Contempt may not be the same thing as taking someone’s life, but if you think about murder and taking someone’s life, it is the epitome of saying, essentially, it is the most obvious way of saying, “Your life doesn’t matter, because I can take it from you, and whether you’re here or not does not matter to me, because your life is worthless.” Jesus is saying that contempt actually says the same thing, that having contempt in your heart towards someone else is saying that you are worthless, you are trash, you are nothing. He is saying that essentially it is the starting place of that. Murder and contempt share the same root. They both devalue God’s image in others.

So, what Jesus is teaching is that murder and anger and insults, they maybe are not separate categories for sin, even though they have different consequences, but they are different stages of the same root problem. Jesus is saying contempt is the first step towards devaluing someone’s life, and that road, those steps lead to a place where people’s lives have no value, they have no worth, and we do not care whether or not they are here. Jesus is rooting this ethic, this teaching on this idea that every single person in this room or watching online, every single person is created in the image of God, and that every single one of us, we bear God’s handiwork and His craftsmanship, and that on a spiritual and soul and physical level, we have been made as images that represent the creator of the universe, and so therefore have sacred

and infinite worth, and contempt and murder fly in the face of that reality. It is like spitting on a portrait of God's child.

Now a few months ago, earlier this year, my son Landon, he is about two now, but he started walking very early, and he is a climber. Just yesterday, he was up on the kitchen table when I came down the stairs. I have no idea how he got there. He is the kind of kid that, like not quite two, he will push chairs over against the counter so he can crawl on the counter. He is trying to figure out how to get on top of the fridge, because that is where we keep the snacks because it is the highest place in the kitchen, and he is like, "I will get those snacks. Like I can do it," and so he loves to climb, and earlier this year, it was like January, February, snowing, and so the kids, they were just a little crazy. Steffy was out, so I took them to get dinner at the mall. We got Chipotle, and then we went to, in Southwest Plaza, there is like this little kids' zone where you can play, and essentially in the kids' zone, it is everything in the room is padded and soft, so kids can climb all over the stuff, and you do not have to hover there, because they will be safe for the most part, and no one is going to break any bones. They might get some bumps or bruises, and so Landon, he has just turned one, and he is a climber, and so he is climbing on all of these things that are like all the bigger kids are climbing on, and he just has this biggest smile on his face of like, "Look at me, Dad. I am climbing with all these kids," standing at the top and clapping for himself. He is feeling so proud of himself, and as I am watching this play out, I see this bigger kid, about a ten-year-old, climb up to the same thing that Landen was on top of. It is like a five-foot thing that he is on top of, and this ten-year-old looks at him and says, "You're too small to be up here," and he shoves him off the thing, and I do not honestly know how to describe it, other than when I saw it play out, like I am sure you have seen different acts of violence in your life, where you just see someone treat someone with complete loathing, complete contempt, like they do not matter. That was what it felt like in this moment, is that this ten-year-old looked at a one-year-old and said, "You have nowhere, like I am just going to shove you."

I have to admit to you and confess that I saw a red at that moment, I got so angry, and I made a scene. I think the first words out of my mouth as I caught Landon, and I thank God he was okay. He did not get hurt at all, but I caught him, and the first words out of my mouth were, "You cannot push my son," and then I went and I tried to find his mom, and we got into, not a tiff, because she was horrified that her son had done that, but I was like, "What is going on? This kid should not be," and I was so angry, and here is why I say that, because in that moment, it felt like this illustration of what it is like when we push each other around. As a father, if it brought out that kind of anger within me, how much more so does our heavenly Father feel anger when we push around his children and when we treat them with contempt and we treat them like they are worthless and they do not matter and that they are fools and that they have no value?

There is this element of what Jesus is trying to teach, that it does not matter what tribe someone is in. It does not matter what political viewpoint they hold. It does not matter what religion they hold. It does not matter if they look like you or do not look like you. It does not matter how much you agree with them or how much you disagree with them about the smallest thing or the largest thing. Every single person you come into contact with, every single person you lock eyes with, is created in the image of God and so has infinite worth and value, and so Jesus is bringing the heart of God forward to say, "How dare you treat my child or my children like this, with anger and murder in your heart?"

Here is the second part of the story. It is if I am honest with you, I think my reaction to that child that pushed my kid, if I am really honest with you, and this is a confession, I think I was right to try to protect Landon, but there is this line that I think we all know and understand where anger turns from trying to protect someone to trying to make sure they pay. I wanted that kid to feel small. I wanted him to know and feel embarrassed for what he had done to Landon. I wanted him to pay, and what we do when we go from having an anger that wants to protect others to an anger that wants others to pay for what they have done is we end up in the place where we play God and where we think we get to judge others for what has happened. I do not know that kid's story. I do not know what he has been through. I have no idea about what would possess him to do something like that, but I know he was created in the image of God. This line that I think we sometimes feel between this righteous anger, it is such a thin line between feeling completely and totally justified in the anger we feel towards someone to getting to the place where we just want them to pay and we want vengeance. That is the line that Jesus is talking about in this passage, and He is saying that it is so, so slippery. It is so easy to go from that place where we feel completely justified in what we see happening in the world and the anger that we feel, but like me, sometimes that anger turns into contempt, and we justify that kind of anger, but we just want other people to pay. What Jesus is saying is that in God's kingdom, according to the Sermon on the Mount, He is saying in God's kingdom, anger and insults, they are not just impolite. They are not just mistakes. They are not just small missteps. They are actually the seeds of violence, that when we have that contempt in our heart, when we feel that anger, when we insult someone, when we dismiss their humanity, it is actually just one step closer to acts of violence that we see perpetrated in our world all the time.

Sometimes we see violence in our world, and we wonder why is this the cycle that we continually repeat? Jesus says that cycle starts here with the way you talk about people, with the names that you call them, with the feelings that you have towards them, even in your heart that no one might even see except for God Himself. So that is what Jesus is getting at when He says that when you even insult someone or when you even just carry that contempt in your heart, that you are on the path towards the fires of Gehenna, the fires of hell, you are continuing that cycle of destruction. You are continuing that cycle of violence,

So, to try to drive this point home of how seriously Jesus wants us to take the anger within our hearts, He has two illustrations, two things that He gives us that illustrate the point that He is trying to make two word-pictures, if you will. The first one is found in verse 23, and it says, after this teaching, He said, "Therefore." another way to hear this might be, "Imagine for a moment." "Imagine for a moment that you are offering your gift at the altar." You have come to the church or the temple to worship, and you are getting ready to offer your gift and your sacrifice, "and there you remember that your brother or sister has something against you. Leave your gift there in front of the altar and first go and be reconciled to them. Then come and offer your gift."

Now I think when Jesus offered this teaching, a pin could have dropped on the side of the mountain that He was talking about, because here is what worship looked like in that day. If you were going to the temple to offer a gift, unless you lived in Jerusalem, that was a many days' journey. That was your vacation time. That was the way that you would get away from your daily life. You would leave your farm or your work or your business behind, and you would go to the city of Jerusalem, and while you were in Jerusalem, you would bring all of your gifts, all of your sacrifices, to the temple. It was a whole ordeal, an undertaking,

getting your whole family there. It was not like you and me, if we go on a trip, we just load up the van or the truck, and we head on our way, and like we get there in a reasonable time. It was a many days' journey to go to worship at the temple, and Jesus is saying, in that situation where you have traveled for days to come and worship God, if you get there, and you remember that someone has something against you, and notice how Jesus leaves it a little vague. Someone has something against you. It is that you have harmed someone, or someone has harmed you. It is a little open-ended. So if you remember you have conflicts with someone, that someone has contempt against you for something you have done, or you are holding contempt in your heart against them for something they have done, He is saying that even if you are the victim or the villain in the story, it is up to you to go and reconcile, and He says, I want you to leave the worship behind. God does not want your sacrifice if there is contempt in your heart between you and a fellow image-bearer. That is how seriously God takes reconciliation. It is that even the most heartfelt worship falls short of what He desires if we are harboring contempt and anger and resentment in our hearts towards fellow humans, so He says, "Go and reconcile, and then you can come back and do the offering."

Then He gives us a second illustration, and He shifts the illustration to the courtroom, and He says, "I want you to settle matters quickly with your adversary, who is taking you to court." So again, He is saying, imagine for a moment, it is a parallel, "Imagine for a moment that you owe someone a debt, and they are taking you to court." You are being sued, and He says, "Imagine you were being sued, someone is taking you to court. I want you to settle matters quickly with your adversary who is suing you and taking you to court and do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison, and truly I tell you, that you will not get out until you have paid every last penny."

I think there are times when we hear Jesus' teaching, where we are like, okay, tracking, tracking, tracking, and then He takes a weird turn, and you are like, "What are you talking about? We were just talking about anger and reconciliation, and now I am in debt, and someone is suing me? What do these have to do with each other?" Does anyone ever feel like that with Jesus' teaching? It is this parable that is trying to drive the point home. In ancient Israel, this idea would have been a scene that was very familiar to most of the people. People who were poor, people who were ostracized, people who did not have enough to make ends meet, would take on debt, and debt disputes could escalate very, very rapidly. If you owed someone money, or if you wronged them in some way, they could physically seize you and drag you before the judge, and if they dragged you before a judge, if you did not settle the matter, then the case would just snowball, and once the judge ruled, you could be handed over to an officer and thrown into a debtor's prison, where you would not get out until your debt was fully paid. Now, here is the challenge with that whole system. It is that when you were in prison, there was no way for you to make any money, and so you were literally in prison unless someone else came and paid off the debt for you. Hang on to that thought. What Jesus is saying is that conflict and this idea of contempt and the way that we can treat each other, it is like a debt that compounds on interest, and that the longer that we leave things unresolved, the heavier it grows, and it can snowball to this place where it might have started so small, but when we leave it unresolved, when we do not reconcile, it just grows to the point where it can compound and crush you beneath its weight, so Jesus is saying, settle things quickly. Do not let them compound. Do not let bitterness enslave you. Do not let contempt harden your heart into a prison that you cannot escape.

Jesus is teaching that reconciliation with others in the kingdom of heaven is not optional. It is so central to His life of the kingdom and ethics of the kingdom that it takes precedence over the holiest, most heartfelt acts of worship. There should be an urgency behind reconciling with others. Whether you are the one who has committed the offense, or they are the one who has offended you, it is our responsibility to not let ourselves get to the place of bitterness. I think what Jesus is saying in this passage, my interpretation of it, is that you cannot claim to love God while withholding reconciliation from your neighbor, that if there is a neighbor, a fellow image-bearer in this world that you cannot reconcile with, that you are withholding reconciliation from and claiming to love God, it is impossible.

Let's just name the reality of that for a moment. I say this pastorally, there are many of you in the room who have been on the receiving end of some of the things that we have talked about today, the insults, the slander, the mistreatment, and the contempt. When someone commits those kinds of acts of violence against you, it is really, really hard to reconcile, and when we have committed those same types of acts, it is hard to reconcile the shame, the guilt, the way that we feel, the way that our hearts can harden and try to justify what we have done, but Jesus is saying when we stay in that place, it only continues this level of contempt that we see throughout our world that just continues to perpetuate the cycles of violence and demonization that we have towards others.

I think this teaching from Jesus is so important, because we live in a culture of contempt. Every single day, our culture is trying to disciple us into a place where we hate them, or we do not want them, or the people in that party or that party do not deserve our love or our compassion. We live in a world of contempt, where we dehumanize people consistently by the ways that we call them different names that take away their humanity. I was even reminded this week of just the way that we treat different groups of people, and we can dehumanize people like the elderly or people with disabilities or the unborn, and we just think people that are in these different categories do not deserve protection or care or the love of the Father, and Jesus is saying, when you have that heart, when you look at the world, no wonder we see the violence and the vitriol and the hatred and the spewing that we see plague our society. What He is calling us to as followers of Jesus is to a different countercultural ethic, where no matter what camp or tribe or no matter what someone has done, no matter how they have treated us, that we still see them as image-bearers, people who are worthy of the Father's love, people who deserve reconciliation.

There was a story that I heard recently. Well, let me get to that in a second, because here is the real place that I think this goes. It is this culture of contempt that we live in. It is not just out there. It lives in here, right? Like that was my story with that kid, that lives in here. The contempt we feel for others is not just something we see in our culture. It is something that creeps into our marriages. At times it poisons our relationship with our children. It gets to this place that it divides family, and it even infects churches. Jesus is calling us to a different way, to be a people, a community where anger is confessed, not coddled, where reconciliation is urgent, not optional, where every human being is treated as sacred, because they were created in the image of God. In a culture of contempt, Jesus calls us to be a people of reconciliation, so when the world says, "cancel them," Jesus says, "go to them," and when the world says, "just write them off," Jesus says, "you need to make it right." In a world that sorts people into different categories, Jesus attempts to restore people into community.

I was reminded of that idea this week when I was talking to a friend, and he reminded me of a story about a pastor from Canada named Danielle Strickland. Danielle, if you do not know her, she is a pastor who has committed her entire life to working towards reconciliation with different groups of people that are in a conflict with each other. In order to learn a little bit more of how to do that as a pastor and someone who is fighting for reconciliation in the world in Jesus' name, she decided to go to Rwanda after the thirty-year anniversary of the genocide that happened there, where over a million people were killed in just a few months. While she was traveling around the country, she saw a lot of different things that were happening that took her breath away of these different groups of people who had been committing murder and genocide against each other. As she saw this story playing out, there was one moment in particular when she went to a church service, and she came to find out that in the church service, sitting right in the front of the worship center was a woman whose entire family had been killed in the genocide, her entire family, children, parents, everyone, and she was sitting next to a man who had been at her village that day that her entire family had been murdered. He had been one of the people who had committed those atrocities against her village and her family, and they were sitting together in worship, and it just blew Danielle Strickland's mind. She did not understand, she did not have a category for how they could be sitting next to each other, worshiping the same God, opening scriptures together, praying next to each other, and so she went to this woman, and she said, "I don't understand. How could you sit next to a person who did that to you and to your family?" Do you know what the woman's response was? To Danielle Strickland, who has committed her life for Jesus to reconciliation, this woman said, "Oh, you must not know Jesus, because if you knew Jesus, you would understand."

That is the ethic that Jesus is calling us to. We have a lot of division in our culture, and we have a lot of people who spit vitriol and hatred and anger towards people who disagree about the things that they think are really important, but as Christians and followers of Jesus, what He is saying is you should be able to sit next to that person in worship, praying with them, opening scripture together, receiving the same elements of the Lord's Supper, because you know Jesus, and his way is different. That is the beauty of the story. It is that type of reconciliation we can't actually do on our own. It comes from the story that did not start with us. It comes from the story where God Himself, while we were still enemies, while we considered ourselves enemies of God, God came to us, to reconcile us to Him. He took the first step, and then scripture tells us that He is reconciling all things to Himself. He is reconciling you, your heart, your life, your family, the world to Himself through the blood of Jesus, and then if you follow Jesus, you have been given the ministry of reconciliation, which means that you are called to go be an ambassador to the world, to tell them this wonderful story about how God has reconciled the world to Himself, and this is where the story starts: "On the night He was betrayed." That is what we say at communion.

We are about to take the elements. In communion, we start that story of reconciliation on the night He was betrayed. On the night one of his closest friends completely betrayed Him and sold Him to be killed, on the night that one of his followers denied him three times and said, "I never knew Him," on the night that all of the rest of the followers abandoned him and ran away, Jesus said these words, "This is my body, broken for you. This is my blood of the new covenant poured out for you for the forgiveness of your sins." God has reconciled us to Himself through the sacrifice of Jesus, who not just theoretically did that for the sins you would someday commit, but who actually lived that out the night that He was murdered.

He reconciled and broke bread and had communion with His followers, who were about to betray Him. That is the mindset that as followers of Jesus we should have as we follow in his footsteps, and so as I invite the people who are going to share communion with you, we come to the table today to remember that moment, to remember the table of reconciliation, that this is the table where enemies become friends and become family, that this is the table where contempt dies and where grace lives and abounds because of what Jesus has done to us. Before you come forward today, I am going to ask you very specifically to potentially pause, because if something is stirred inside you, and there's a place that you need to experience reconciliation, if there is a place that you need to send someone a text right now in this moment, Jesus says, worship can wait. Reconcile, pray, reach out to the person, take the first step towards them, so that you can experience life in the kingdom. So, I would encourage you to take time to pray, to reflect, and maybe before you come forward to the table of reconciliation, you take a step towards reconciliation to someone in your life who needs it, and then when you are ready, come forward. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, God, we come before you, and we just recognize in honesty that there are many people in this room who are hurting and in need of reconciliation. There are people who have experienced what we have talked about today, this kind of contempt, this type of anger, who have been treated as if their life does not matter, and so God, I pray for them specifically in this moment, that you would do the work of reconciliation in their heart, the work of healing in their heart. God, I also know that there are people like me in this room who have held that same anger in their hearts. There are people like me in this room who have held contempt for their neighbor, who have not treated their enemies with the love of God or seen their enemies or the people who have hurt them with the idea that they are created in the image of God. So, Father, I pray for those who are like me, that as we come to the table, we could experience the promise of your forgiveness, the blood of the covenant poured out so that we could experience forgiveness from you. God, I pray that as we come to the table today, it would not just be ritual or worship, but it would be an act of remembrance, of the reconciliation you gave to us, and that therefore we might be challenged and empowered and emboldened to go into the world that is desperate for this kind of healing, to end the cycles of violence and anger and contempt, and it is only in the kingdom of Jesus that we can experience healing from those wounds, and so, God, may we be a people who go and help bring healing to the world. May we be ambassadors for that story. It is in Christ's name we pray, amen.

I want to read to you from Second Corinthians 5 today as we close our time together: "All of this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and then gave us the ministry of reconciliation, that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them, and that He has committed to us, He has given us the message of reconciliation, and we are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God, because God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."

As we close our time together today, as we get ready to go have a blast at Fall Festival, that is the heart of why we do Fall Festival. I want you to think about the world and how many different messages of contempt they have received from the church. This is our chance. This is a moment for us to give them something different, to give them the message of hope and what Jesus has done for us and his heart for

them, so let's go out there have an awesome time and celebrate the life of the kingdom that Jesus has given us through his blood, amen? Amen. You may go in peace.

46:51 minutes

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Edited by Tom Kenaston

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