

Sermon Title: Be Whole
Biblical Text: Matthew 5:21-37
Teaching Series: Kingdom Being
Preaching Date: June 25, 2023
Preacher: Jason C. Helveston

Matthew 5:21-37

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 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. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ 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. "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' 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. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil."

So far in Jesus' sermon we've looked at the *character, influence, and righteousness* of his disciples. Remember, the Sermon on the Mount (these three chapters in Matthew's biography of Jesus) ... it's all about an interim vision for Jesus' followers. Between his first and second coming, Jesus wants his people to embrace a kingdom way of being—an identity and culture which is neither moralistic nor lawless. It's kingdom.

The next series of movement goes deeper into this vision of righteousness. Jesus is not about abolishing the law but fulfilling it. He sees beyond the letter of the law to the heart. And he wants his disciples to do the same. He wants his listeners to understand how their lives are meant to fulfill God's original moral vision. To do so he walks through six different commands or ideas: anger, lust, oaths, divorce, retaliation, and love. We'll look at the first four today and the last two next Sunday.

The last two have a connection, *how to love difficult people*.

But the first four have a unique connection as well, *how to be whole people in a fracture world*.

That's what I'd like to talk about today. I want to talk about how Jesus' righteousness makes us whole. Jesus wants to heal us. He wants his followers to be whole. That's what the kingdom is all about: *bringing together what has been fractured by sin*. Sin has separated God from humanity. Sin has separated heaven and earth. Sin has separated people from each other. And sin has also fractured our individual lives. Anger, lust, deception, and divorce all cause destructive division in our souls. Yet through the healing power of the gospel, you and I can be reconciled or made whole emotionally, physically, and spiritually. And so I want to walk through three sections of this passage and consider how Jesus brings back together what sin has separated.

That's how we'll organize our time ...

- ***Emotional*** wholeness (vv.21-26).
- ***Physical*** wholeness (vv.27-30).
- ***Spiritual*** wholeness (vv.31-37).

[Prayer]

Movement 1: Emotional Wholeness (vv.21-26, Psalm 4:3-4, James 1:19-20)

Jesus begins with our emotions. Specifically, he talks about anger. *Read Matthew 5:21-22 ... “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 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.* All of Jesus' specific instructions in this movement follow a pattern ... *here's what you've heard ... now here's what I say ... and so here's what's gonna happen or what needs to happen as a result.*

He begins with the sixth commandment. That's Exodus 20:13. It simply says, "***You shall not murder.***" But in his recollection of the commandment, Jesus adds something not in the OT text. He includes a consequence, "***whoever murders will be liable to judgment.***" What's going on here? Well, Jesus is describing not just what the OT teaches but also how the religious teachers of his day are interpreting and applying God's Word. Jewish leaders aren't just telling people what God said. They're also putting their tradition's spin on those teachings. In the case of murder, it seems they not only are saying don't murder but also murders are liable to eternal judgment. Now Jesus steps in explaining to his disciples that the punishment the Pharisees believe is reserved for murders is reserved for, *what's he say? ... Look at v.22, Read Matthew 5:22 ... everyone who is angry with his brother.* Jesus is

reframing righteousness around the heart. It's not about if you physically wound or kill someone. It's about bitterness, hatred, and anger in the heart.

In reframing around the heart, Jesus is really diagnosing a deeper ailment: sin has separated anger from love. Sin separates our anger from our love. Here's what I mean ...

In both the Psalms and in the Apostle Paul's writings the refrain "***be angry and do not sin***" is repeated multiple times (see Psalm 4:4 and Ephesians 4:26). That tells us anger is not all bad. The Bible teaches us two types of anger: *an anger that gives birth to sin and an anger that doesn't*. The first type of anger comes from fear and the second from love. After all, God gets angry and he is the definition of love.

In his sermon, Jesus is addressing the anger of fear. Fear always fractures our emotional consciousness. *Why?* Well, because fear never lets you sleep. Our weariness often surfaces as anger. Anger is an attempt to drive away our fear through control and manipulation and inflicting pain. But it doesn't work. In fact, it makes us more fearful and more angry. What's more, we're constantly judging ourselves for being angry. Which complicates our fractured souls. *The New York Times* recently reported on new research which indicates this complication of our anger. Melinda Moyer reported, "*that people who habitually judge negative feelings — such as sadness, fear and anger — as bad or inappropriate have more anxiety and depression symptoms and feel less satisfied with their lives than people who generally perceive their negative emotions in a positive or*

neutral light" (*Lean Into Negative Emotions. It's the Healthy Thing to Do*. April 21, 2023). *Ironically, we get angry that we're angry and that makes us even more angry.*

Perhaps this is why the psalmist knew it was wise to slow down when heavy emotions creep in. *Read Psalm 4:4-5 ... Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Selah Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord.* The Apostle James takes David's queue telling his readers, *Read James 1:19-20 ... Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.* The anger of fear, never produces rest. It never leads to righteousness. Therefore when we are angry, we aren't whole or healthy. We need to slow down. The biblical writers invite us to interrogate our negative emotions and see that they match God's emotions.

God is often angry. The Bible is unapologetic about the nature of God's wrath. Though we are often perplexed by it. In fact, one of the primary struggles some of you may have with the God of the Bible is his anger. We presume wrath steals away from his love. However, Dr. Tim Keller points out in his book, *Forgive*, that not only are God's love and anger not in tension, but they are meaningless apart from one another (4). They establish one another. *You see, God only gets angry when someone or something he loves is being destroyed.* God is whole. Or we could say, God's anger is always in harmony with his love. This is what's disjointed in us. Fear makes us angry rather than love.

So, *how can we be made whole?*

How can fear be eradicated?

How are love and anger reconciled within us?

Jesus gives us some practical counsel about what we do with our unrighteous anger. ***Read Matthew 5:23-26 ... So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.*** Jesus says hanging on to anger toward someone is like murdering them. So, *what should we do?* We should seek reconciliation. We should seek forgiveness. We should repent of sin. We should confess our anger. You see, the anger of fear hates to be named. When we speak honestly about our anger we take away its destructive power.

Let's be clear, reconciliation is not about overlooking what's making us angry. Reconciliation is about naming what's making us angry and reaching for love instead of fear. After all, this is the gospel. When God's wrath was on us, he neither overlooked our sin nor destroyed us. Rather, he sent his Son to bear his wrath or anger for us. He reached for love. Or rather, loved reached for us.

Anger has been fractured by fear.

In Christ, perfect love makes us whole by driving out fear.

Movement 2: Physical Wholeness (vv.27-28,29-30, Genesis 3:7)

Jesus moves from our inward lives to our bodies. Like our emotions, our bodies have been divided and devastated by sin. *Read Matthew 5:27-28 ... You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* Again, notice the pattern. *You've heard ... But I say ...* Again, Jesus is reframing the righteousness around the heart. In this case, he's teaching about the seventh commandment. It's in Exodus 20:14. It says, "*You shall not commit adultery.*" Like murder, the religious class legalistically held the line of adultery at not having sex with someone with whom you are not married. But what Jesus points out, is that while they may not have intercourse, people are capable of committing adultery in their hearts.

In other words, Jesus is saying the seventh commandment isn't just about your bodies, it was about your soul's relationship with our bodies.

Now, many of us carry a lot of pain and false notions of our bodies and our sexuality. In recent history, the American Church has not articulated a biblical vision for wholeness in our bodies. Our souls and bodies have always been

fractured more deeply. For many of us this stems from what has been popularly dubbed as "purity culture." Purity culture was a movement within conservative Christian communities through much of the nineties on into the early 2000's. During this time Christian bible teachers, authors, and ministries painted a frightening picture of sex in order to keep kids sexually abstinent until marriage. However, the byproduct of the movement was a deeply confused and fractured generation of Christians. We were told what not to do with our bodies, but were never taught the beauty of our bodies. Let alone, how our souls and bodies belonged together.

Biblically speaking, our body finds wholeness when it's understood and seen—by us and others—through the lens of the soul. Human beings are not only bearers of God's image (Genesis 1:27) ... and not only do we see the perfect expression of our humanity in the Eternal Son of God taking on a fleshly form (John 1:14) ... but also we are the union of mind, spirit, heart, and strength (see Deuteronomy 6:5). Our body and soul belong together. Yet, sin has separated the body from the soul.

- Think about pornography. It's the practice of detaching a body, or even body parts, into the merely physical and visible commodity for self-centered pleasure. Rather than seeing the body through a soul, meant for glory and relationship. In other words, the real violation of porn is the belittling of a body-soul person into just a body.

- Think about purity culture. It isn't about discipling people into healthy relationships. It scares us into distrusting our bodies and fearing the bodies of another, particularly the opposite sex. It scares us into separating boys and girls solely based upon the perceived danger of our bodies' dissimilarities. We were never taught the beauty of our bodies' unique role in the drama of God's redemptive story.

This body-soul separation is, of course, not new. The original fracture of our bodies took place back in the Garden of Eden. If you know the story, then you know that one of the very first things Adam and Eve experienced when they sinned was seeing their nakedness. You see, before sin the first couple was naked but they were also unashamed (Genesis 2:25). However, when they disobeyed God, ***Read Genesis 3:7 ... Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. Why? Why did sin bring bodily shame?*** Pastor Rich Villodas observes, before the Fall "***Adam and Eve didn't live blind to each other's bodies ... but their gazes didn't begin and end with a fixation of each other's body parts but rather in the wholeness of their being***" (*The Deeply Formed Life*, 135). In other words, they saw their bodies through their souls. But sin separated their bodies from their souls ... and shame stepped in. When sin opened their eyes, they saw less.

In the fracture of our own physical bodies, we see less too.

In his sermon, Jesus is giving us our spiritual sight back. As adultery detaches sex from covenant, lust detaches body from soul. And so, his disciples don't just avoid sex with someone with whom they aren't married. Rather, his disciples see their wholeness and that of their fellow image bearers—body and soul. This is a devastating fracture. It's so troubling that Jesus tell his disciples to take drastic action to prevent such a bifurcation of the divine image. *Read Matthew 5:29-30 ...*

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

At first blush, this seems really extreme and perhaps counter-intuitive to the wholeness we've been discussing. However, Jesus is not speaking literally (though many through history have taken it as such). He's speaking metaphorically. He doesn't just want his disciples to avoid sex with someone they aren't married to, but he wants them to not look at what causes them to lust ... and he wants them to stop doing whatever causes them to lust.

This actually takes us back to Romans 14. Remember, because righteousness is a matter of the heart, not every experience or action that is sinful for one person is sinful for another (see esp. v.23). Some of you can watch certain movies, go to the beach or the gym, or wear certain clothes and it doesn't cause you to separate body and soul. Others can't. Some of you can maintain close relationship with the opposite sex or same sex and enjoy platonic intimacy. Others can't. And while we should all be seeking to grow in maturity in what theologian Marva Dawn calls our

“sexual character,” we should also acknowledge our weaknesses as we seek wholeness.

One of the beautiful mysteries of Jesus’ resurrected body is that it’s old and new. People, like a couple on the road to Emmaus, didn’t recognize Jesus at first (Luke 24). Yet, when one of Jesus’ disciples, Thomas wanted proof, Jesus invites him to feel the wounds in his hands and at his side (John 20:27). Jesus’ new body gives us a massive clue about the future of our bodies—they will be old and new. It will be us, even bearing some of the scars of life perhaps. And yet, it will be new glorified and unaffected by the ailments of this life (1 Corinthians 15).

Bodies have been fractured from souls.

In Christ, our bodies bear his image now and will one day be whole and glorified.

Movement 3: Spiritual Wholeness (vv.31-37, 19:4-6, John 17:20-21)

From wholeness of our emotions and body, Jesus now invites his disciples to experience wholeness of spirit. Specifically he talks about divorce and making oaths. On the surface these may not seem like deeply spiritual things. However, our view of marriage and making promises reveals our understanding of God. Here’s what Jesus says, *Read Matthew 5:31-32 ... “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ 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.”

Once again, Jesus is reframing righteousness around the heart.

Religious habits around marriage—like with murder and adultery—followed the letter of the law. Men were told to present their wives with a certificate of divorce to make the divorce legal (see Deuteronomy 24:1). But when Moses gave this law he was actually trying to protect women from being flippantly cast aside for minor inconveniences or disagreements or simply because their husband was no longer interested. Jesus makes it clear in Matthew 19 that this law was a provision because of their hardness of heart, not because of God’s design of marriage. Jesus responds to a group of religious leaders when they ask about this divorce law, ***Read Matthew 19:4-6 ... “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”*** Notice, when they want to know about divorce, Jesus points them to God. *Why?* Because marriage is about God. Marriage represents two becoming one. God and people. Heaven and earth. Male and Female. Marriage is a living and breathing metaphor of the gospel—like and unlike joining together in wholeness. That means, the question is less about divorce and much more about the meaning of marriage. And though marriage is for us, marriage is not about us. Jesus is saying, *this is a spiritual issue.*

The same is true with making oaths. He continues, *Read Matthew 5:33-37 ...*

Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' 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. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil." Righteousness is reframed around the heart. What was said was that

you shouldn't swear falsely. *Why?* He says no matter what you swear by, you're swearing to God. The heavens are his. The earth is his. Jerusalem is his. John Stott explains, *"you cannot avoid some reference to God, for the whole world is God's world and you cannot eliminate him from any of it"* (101). The religious class taught that using God's name made the vow binding. But now Jesus speaks. He says, don't make oaths. In other words, people were separating God from parts of their lives and Jesus is saying, you can't do that. So, *let your yes be yes and your no be no.* Be people of your word, always.

That's the last fracture.

In our sin and hurry and pride ... we have a tendency of fracturing God from parts of our lives too. But we were made to be with him and he with us in all thin Yet, we We separate God from our marriages. We separate God from our promises. We separate God from our business dealings. We separate God from non-Christians friendships. We separate God from our our kids' education journey. We separate

God from our medical concerns and housing needs. We separate God from our personal lives and dating lives and sex lives and family dysfunction? *You see?*

Jesus wants his disciples to be whole. That's the very reason he came. Jesus closes the gap between humanity and God, not simply by coming to earth but also by dying. Through his death Jesus heals humanity's fractured relationship with God. Therefore nothing we do is free from considering God. We are with him. He is with us. This is the eternal intimacy, the wholeness Jesus prays for in John 17. ***Read John 17:20-21 ... "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."*** Sin fractured our union with God. Jesus has made us whole. He makes us spiritually whole.

We all need healing. Many of us perhaps are longing for emotional and physical wholeness. But ultimately our greatest need is spiritual union and intimacy with God. In fact, as we've seen, the healing of our hearts and bodies is a direct result of our cosmic healing. *Do you need the Lord's emotional healing today? Do you need to be made whole in the way you see your body or the body of another? Do you need to be made spiritual whole?*

Sin has fractured our lives. Jesus makes us whole.