**Epiphany 6 23 Matt 5 Guilt from the Law**

Grace mercy and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Seated

The sermon is titled “Guilt from the Law.” Our text is the Gospel lesson without verses 23 to 26.

**Matthew 5:21–37** “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your ‘Yes' be ‘Yes,' and your ‘No,' ‘No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Here ends our text

After Jesus rose from the dead, He instructed His church to proclaim repentance and the forgiveness of sins in the name of Christ. Repentance consists of two parts.  One part is contrition, that is, guilt striking the conscience through the knowledge of sin.  Let me repeat that - contrition, that is, guilt striking the conscience through the knowledge of sin. The other part of repentance is faith, which is born of the Gospel or the Absolution and believes that for Christ’s sake, sins are forgiven.  Today’s Gospel lesson is Jesus delivering pure undiluted 200 proof **guilt** that strikes the conscience through the knowledge of sin.

This is the part of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus begins to unpack a few of the commandments. You shall not murder.  You shall not commit adultery.  You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.  When we hear what Jesus has to say about these commandments, we begin to realize that there is not a commandment in the Bible that we do not break on a regular basis.  When Jesus gets done with today’s verses, anyone who insists that they do not sin is lying to themselves.  Not only that, but they are, in fact, on the wide road that leads straight to hell.

Many, many people will try to defend themselves by saying, “Well, at least I have never killed anyone.” In today’s Gospel, Jesus turns on these people and asks, “Have you ever been angry with someone?  Have you ever insulted someone?  Have you ever ridiculed someone?  Well! Have you?” You deserve the fire of hell.

Many a man will say, “I have been faithful to my wife.” In today’s Gospel, Jesus asks if your mind is as pure as your body.  Do you mean to tell me that you weren’t attracted to that ward robe malfunction during a previous Super Bowl halftime show? … or you weren’t attracted to that scantily dressed women in that one commercial?

Women, have you never wondered what it would be like to have a sensitive and caring husband who was more like the male lead in that one movie?  Have you ever fantasized about what it might be like to be a character in that racy romance novel? … or that TV soap opera?  Really, ask yourself what is your motivation in reading or watching that stuff in the first place?  There is more than one way to commit adultery in the heart.

Then Jesus tells us to cut off the body parts that cause us to sin.  It is better to enter heaven mutilated than to be a perfect physical specimen when you enter hell. … **This is brutal stuff**. Pure undiluted 200 proof **guilt** that strikes the conscience through the knowledge of sin.

What about “no fault” divorce?  Jesus makes that equal to adultery as well.  Jesus leaves no easy outs.  If there is divorce, then there is sin.  Either someone was unfaithful and caused the divorce … or the divorce itself is adultery.  “No fault” divorce is not an option according to Jesus.

Then there’s the teaching against lying.  People who habitually tell the truth don’t have to take an oath.  They simply have a trustworthy reputation.  On the other hand, it is probably a lie when someone starts saying things like, “It’s true!  I swear!  Cross my heart!” … We all probably learned early in life that people who resort to such exclamations are probably lying.  Jesus teaches us to lead a life of such a reputation that a simple ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ is more trustworthy than an oath signed in blood.

…. So, how are you doing?  Jesus went through about 2 ½ of the Ten Commandments and **my** self-righteousness is shattered … lying in ruins.  If God were to give me what I deserve, I would still be on the road to hell.  ….. How about you? ….. Jesus has unpacked just a few of the commandments and I am already crushed.  What kind of guilt waits for us in the rest of the law?  How can we hope to survive under the crushing weight of the law? … It’s a lost cause.

…. That is where we are if we try to earn our salvation or maintain our relationship with God by keeping the law.  It is a lost cause.  We can’t do it.  In fact, every effort we put forth in trying to keep the law only moves us further along on that wide road that leads to destruction.  As is said in the rite of Holy Baptism: The Word of God also teaches that we are all conceived and born sinful and are under the power of the devil until Christ claims us as His own. We would be lost forever unless delivered from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation.

Fortunately for us, Jesus instructed the church to proclaim repentance and the forgiveness of sins.  It would be unbearable if the guilt side of repentance was all that we had, but it is not.  We cannot save ourselves, but there is one who can.  As the rite of Holy Baptism goes on to say: But the Father of all mercy and grace has sent His Son Jesus Christ, who atoned for the sin of the whole world, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

… We cannot live the life that Jesus preaches in today’s Gospel, but Jesus can and did.  We cannot keep these or any of the other laws set forth in God’s Word, but Christ our Lord and Savior has already kept them.  The one who delivered the pure, undiluted 200 proof guilt of the law in today’s Gospel is also the one who kept it **for us**.  As it says in the Epistle to the Hebrews, read:

**Hebrews 4: 15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

Righteousness is not something we produce for God.  Instead, righteousness is something that Jesus Christ produced for us with **His** holy life. Read:

**2 Corinthians 5: 21** God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus not only produced the righteousness of the law in His life, but He also endured the just punishment that **we** deserved for our sins.  Even though Jesus kept the law perfectly in every detail, He still suffered as though He had sinned.  In fact, He assumed the total guilt of every sin of every human of all times and places.  Read:

**1 John 2: 2** He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Jesus carried our every sinful thought, word, and deed to the cross.  There He assumed the total guilt and suffered the just punishment of all those sins as He offered Himself up as an atonement for **all those sins**. In paying the full price for all our sin Christ totally appeased God’s anger for that sin.

Christ’s suffering on the cross was not just physical suffering. It was far more than that. God’s wrath for the sin of all mankind was taken out on him as he was dying on the cross. At that moment he cried out in agony. Read:

**Matthew 27: 45, 46** From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, *“Eloi, Eloi* , *lama sabachthani?”* —which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

At that moment the entire wrath of God for our sin was taken out on Jesus and we are now saved from God’s wrath for **our** sin. Read:

**Romans 5: 9** Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

**In** Christ’s suffering and death an exchange was made, **but** it is the most unfair exchange ever made.  When **we** come to the exchange in baptism, we are totally corrupt in thought, word, and deed, and Jesus is the righteousness of total perfection.  In the exchange, Jesus takes our sin onto Himself and replaces it with His righteousness.  He takes the punishment of our sin and we take the blessings of His righteousness. And that exchange occurs again and again in our lives as we are absolved of our sin after confession and each time we partake of Holy Communion.

Christ Jesus preached the law in all its terrifying severity. He left absolutely no crack open for self-righteousness.   Then, in His perfect love, He fulfilled that same law for you.  When He had satisfied the entire law, He then satisfied God’s justice by enduring the full punishment that the law demands for your sin.  He paid your sin debt in full.  You are free of the curse of the law, the curse that says the soul that sins shall die.  For Christ’s sake, God the Father treats you as though you are the ones who kept the law perfectly. The most unfair exchange ever made.

Because everything Jesus did for you was perfect, the grave did not have the power to hold Him, but after He died for you, He also rose for you.  His resurrection promises that death will not be able to hold **you**.  Instead on the death of your body you will live on spiritually in heaven as you wait with the Lord until the Last Day.  On that Day, Jesus will raise your physical body to live on a new earth where there is no sin, no pain, no sorrow, no death.  On that new earth, **you** will finally and joyfully live the perfect life that Jesus preached in our Gospel for today.

…. At the beginning we said that repentance consists of two parts.  One part is contrition, that is, guilt striking the conscience through the knowledge of sin. Well Christ laid our sinful selves wide open through our text. The other part of repentance is faith, which is born of the Gospel or the Absolution and **believes** that for Christ’s sake, sins are forgiven. …  Have faith that what Christ did on your behalf is truly available to you if you are sorry for your sins. All that was just described is what awaits those who have faith, who trust, in Christ’s atoning work in his perfect life, his sacrificial death, and his resurrection to eternal life.

Amen

May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard you hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.