

BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study

Sermon: “Honoring Life” (from the “Written in Stone” sermon series)

Scripture: Exodus 20:13 and Matthew 5:21-24

Key take-aways from the Scripture

- In this section of the Book of Exodus, we are exploring the sixth of the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses for the people of Israel. The first four commandments dealt with “No other gods” (20:3) and “No idols” (20:4-6), “No misuse of God’s name” (20:7); “observing the Sabbath” in verses (20:8-11); and “honoring our parents” (20:12). The sixth commandment continues with our focus on our social relationships with one another and commands that we are forbidden from murdering another person.
- The first act of murder we read about in the Bible is the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:1-12. In this story, Cain disregarded the value of the life of his brother Abel and killed him out of jealousy for winning God’s favor from his offerings to God. As a punishment for this murder, God prevented Cain from being able to grow crops, thereby preventing him from being able to provide for himself and condemned him to wander the earth.
- There is a great value placed upon human life, and this commandment forbids us from unlawfully killing another person. This law further differentiates accidentally killing someone from that of deliberate action, which the latter required capital punishment. This is further discussed within the laws concerning personal injury section of Exodus 20:12-14. In other words, God does not forbid all types of killing (i.e. capital punishment for crime, killing in war, to name a few).
- In Matthew 5:21-24, we read about a new look at this idea of murder through Jesus’ teachings on the subject. Jesus starts off by reminding those in attendance that the Ten Commandments forbade murder and adds to the original law to include things that compel us to murder. These include things like hatred, anger, contempt, bitterness, to name a few. Jesus teaches that these negative qualities are so egregious and lead us to dehumanize others, that they should also be treated the same as murder.
- When we exhibit anger and contempt for one another, we strip that person of humanity which then leads us to murderous thoughts and actions.

Key take-aways from the Sermon

- There is a debate among biblical scholars as to which translation is optimal for this verse in Exodus. This boils down to the older translations using the word *kill*, while new ones use the word *murder*. The difference boils down to intent!
 - Regardless, it is all about upholding the *sanctity of life*.
- John Wesley's Three Simple Rules (A Wesleyan Way of Living): (1) Do No Harm; (2) Do Good; and (3) Stay in Love with God (this is key for following rules 1 and 2!).
- Exodus 20:13 is a straightforward decree and the next three chapters that follow contain what is called *case law*. These are precedents and anecdotal situations, where interpretation and judgement is needed beyond the statute. See Exodus 21:12.
- The first story of murder in the Bible is Cain and Abel (Genesis 4). After killing his brother Abel, Cain is forced into exile east of Eden. God puts a mark on him, not to shame him, but to protect him. God is restricting retribution against Cain by issuing a warning to any who harm him.
- The vengeance that God seeks to restrain becomes unrestrained. By Genesis 6, the great flood serves as a great "reset" to this. What emerges after this is a new code of justice called *lex talionis* or an *eye for an eye* (the law of retaliation). The basis for this is for the punishment to fit the crime, rather than unrestricted vengeance.
 - The problem here is that it does not truly sanctify life. As Gandhi taught, "and eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind."
- Matthew 18:21-35 in teaching forgiveness: "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." In the ancient days, retribution was unlimited. For Jesus, grace is unlimited.
- When we keep score of other's sins against us, we are not really forgiving them. Love does not keep a record of wrongdoing (I Corinthians 13).
- In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He affirms the sixth commandment. He both affirms it and radicalizes it! Reconciliation is more important than who was right or wrong!
- "Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is *stored*, than to the vessel in which it is *poured*." -Mark Twain
- When we seek reconciliation, we must remember that God has a liking for the obvious solution.
- The only kind of killing Jesus ever endorsed was to *kill with kindness*. When we do this, we uphold the sanctity of life. Not only will the one who receives it be changed, but the one who gives it will be transformed!

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- What difference is made between killing someone and murdering someone? Why aren't both treated the same? How are these concepts different?
- What are some practical ways that we can honor the value of life?
- Read Matthew 5:21-26. What is Jesus' teaching in regard to murder?
- Are things like euthanasia, suicide, self-defense, abortion in every case, just war, and capital punishment considered murder?
- Does the shift from unrestricted vengeance to the idea of *lex talionis* or an *eye for an eye* (the law of retaliation), help with curbing revenge and strengthening respect for life? Why?
- Read Matthew 18:21-35. What does this teach us about forgiveness?

