

UNEDITED DRAFT

Dear Friends in Christ,

Today is the fourth part in a sermon series called, "What Would Jesus Preach?" We are imagining that Jesus walked right up the isle here at Good Shepherd and stood in this pulpit to preach. What would he preach about?

We don't really need to speculate about the answer. In Matthew chapters 5,6 and 7 we have a three entire chapters of Scripture that record for us the preaching of Jesus. His disciples gathered around him on a hillside and they leaned in to listen the preaching of Jesus. And today we are gathered here at this church called Good Shepherd, and we are going to do the very same thing. We modern day disciples of Jesus will lean in and listen the preaching of Jesus. What will Jesus preach?

Today we look are going to look at a lot of verses. By all rights we should not take any less than three full sermons to cover these verses, but somehow we're going to breeze through these verses in just one sermon. So those who have been coming here for a while probably know what I'll say next. Homework assignment. I asked you a couple weeks ago to read through the entire sermon on the mount, Matthew 5,6,7 several times a week as we continue this series "What would Jesus preach?" I hope you're all doing that. That assignment stands. But now I'll ask you to do something additional this week. Reread and mediate upon the 17 verse we are looking at today. Because what Jesus is going to challenge us with today is not something you can just think about for the next 20 minutes and really get it. It's going to take time to really sink in. For these verses to really have the full impact Jesus intended will take serious introspection, honesty, transparency before God, sorrow over sin and repentance. We just can't get there in the short time we have today, but we'll get a start, and you'll finish with personal devotion time this week. Okay?

Since we can't take a close look at everything in these verses, I want to start by giving you the big idea Jesus is trying to convey by his preaching here. I don't want you to miss the forest through the trees. What Jesus wants you to give serious, deep consideration to today is this: **What is in your heart?** What is in your heart? What is going on on the inside of you? What are you thinking about? What attitudes do you have? What is your heart set on? What do you desire?

Here's why this is so important. Everyone and everything around us says that what's important is what's on the outside. Turn up your filters. Make sure you say the right things. Behave as people would expect. Give a good impression. When it really matters, make sure people see on the outside what they want to see and expect to see. We live in a world that is concerned about externals and appearances. But is that all that God is concerned about? Do the right things at the right time. Go through the motions. Put on the show. Suppress and bottle up the anger or the lust that lurks within you. Is that what God is looking for?

Jesus makes it clear in the verses that we're about to read that God is just as concerned with what is on the inside. God looks at you from the inside out. God cares about your thoughts, your motives, your attitude. What the world does not consider sin, God does.

So today's message is called "Inside Out" because Jesus teaches us the startling truth that God sees on the inside just as clearly as everyone around us sees on the outside.

Let's listen to the words of Jesus:

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** [these are the words of Jesus that indicate he’s going to take this common knowledge of what is wrong, and take it to a whole new level. **that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.** [*Angry!* If you get angry with another human being, you are subject to God’s judgment! Maybe we don’t understand this right. So Jesus explains:]**Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’** [a word meaning “empty-head”; “I spit on you”] **is answerable to the Sanhedrin.** [Apparently insults would put you before the Jewish moral council. If we had such a thing today, their court cases would be backed up for years.] **But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’** [similar to the other word but stronger... one translation says “you moron!” Maybe we can’t grasp the original impact of both words, but the second is stronger than the other] **will be in danger of the fire of hell.** [In other words, you don’t murder someone, but you get really mad at them and start flinging insults at them and you consider them a worthless human being, you are in danger of hell fire.] **“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.** [In other words, if you hold anger and hatred against someone that you can’t let go of, how can you come before God whom you have hurt and insulted far worse and expect that he will forgive you? Go be reconciled to them, then come see God about your sins being forgiven. **“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.** [Essentially Jesus is saying here “Don’t let conflict escalate.” Things get out of hand, and who knows how it will end for you? It might end badly! Settle the matter quickly and settle it out of court. Don’t let your anger fester and grow, because it’s not likely to end well.

Jesus is teaching us to take another look at ourselves from the inside out. Even if you’re pretty even tempered on the outside, do you get angry and furious with people on the inside? God knows and God cares. The one who does this stands in danger of hellfire.

Again, I’ll tell you when I prepare these sermons I have to preach them to myself first. I am typically one who has a long fuse and I don’t fly off the handle quickly. I am also one who bottles things up and I don’t show a lot of emotion on the outside. Friday afternoon my wife and I were driving to McCool Junction for the NELHS basketball game. Our son Nathan is on the team. On the way there my wife was talking on the cell phone to her mom. I was moving with the flow of traffic in the left lane when an SUV comes up behind me and tailgates. We’re gradually moving past the slower cars in the left lane, and there’s a string of three cars in front of me. When there was a little room in the right lane, I saw the SUV move into the right lane even though we were soon going to pass another car in the right lane.

I was wrong to react this way. Even though I said very few words and I didn’t let any stray fingers fly, my wife took one look at my face and knew it was road rage. God has a way of doing this. He shows something in my own heart and life through the word I’m going to preach so I have to apply it to me first.

Does this happen to you too? When is the last time you flew off the handle filled with rage? Anger? Maybe you kept it bottled up? Jesus says you’re in danger of hell-fire. I’m going to

let that sink in for a little bit while we continue with Jesus' words. We have a lot of ground to cover.

“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. [Looking lustfully is already adultery! I taught this in Russia at a new Bible instruction class. It started as our biggest class ever... almost 50 people crowded into a large Soviet-era conference room. I shared the basic message of the Bible: Law and Gospel. As I explained the law of God I briefly touched on each of the commandments. When I got to the 6th, I talked about what Jesus says here. After the class a tall, handsome man in his early 50's came up to me and said, “If you teach this, you won't have any men in your congregation. All men lust.” He left and never came back.

At the risk of losing some of you, I'm going to emphasize what Jesus did. Looking lustfully at a woman that is not your wife is sinful and is equivalent to adultery. Pornography is a sin. Plain and simple. How serious is this sin? Listen:

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.

Are you feeling condemned yet? Jesus is hammering us with the law today. It's not fun. It hurts. We're not done.

“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.

In this day and age of frequent divorces, God says you're sinning if the divorce was for anything other than marital unfaithfulness. If your spouse maliciously breaks their wedding vow, the innocent party can get a divorce. I don't think this is the case with many, many divorces today. Sin. Jesus says. We're still not done.

“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.

Do you have the habit of swearing or using God's name in vain. Guess who I saw at the mall? I swear to God! OMG. Is it better if we just use the initials? Oh my God. It's offensive to him to use his name frivolously. Let your yes be yes and your know be know.

We're pretty beat up here. But it's what Jesus would preach. It's what Jesus did preach. He shuts us up so we stop defending ourselves, stop excusing, stop rationalizing, stop justifying. He did this to show us that sin is not just what you do on the outside. Sin is something that starts on the inside because you are a sinner. Your very nature is corrupt. By nature you are rotten on the inside. And even when you successfully filter what is seen on the outside, your inside is still the same. Your heart is impure and from the inside out flows all sorts of yucky, disgusting things. Sometimes we succeed in holding it in. But it's every bit as ugly and disgusting.

So what's the good news? The good news is that God cleans up our mess. He purifies us from the inside out. To accomplish this, he sent his Son, Jesus, to live among us. Jesus was holy, clean and pure inside and out. Jesus never got angry with another... except when it was just and right to do so. (Think of Jesus turning over money tables and chasing out the animals in the temple area since people had turned it into a market place. Anger? Yes. Righteous? Yes.) Jesus' thoughts were always good... always right. His attitude, his desires... pure, right holy, true. Not only was Jesus loving and kind and compassionate in his actions, but his heart was the same. Jesus is our perfect substitute.

Our Substitute willingly went the way of the cross to pay the penalty for filthy hearts. When Jesus was crucified, he received what we deserved. Our filthy hearts were placed in him. After Jesus died a spear was jabbed into his side to make sure he was dead. Because of the blood and water that flowed out, many believe that spear went through his heart. It really went through our heart since he took the sins of our heart. The full and bloody payment was made. It is finished.

And so know this: God looks at you from the inside out. That's bad news apart from Christ. But the good news is that in Christ, you have been given a new heart and a new mind. God has cleaned you up from the inside out. He's put a new, perfect holy creation in you. Through baptism he washed you clean... including your heart.

God has forgiven you, cleaned you up, restored you, given you new life, from the inside out. Recognize who God has now made you in Christ Jesus and live on the outside like he has recreated you on the inside. Live a new life in Christ... inside out! Amen.