

Sermon Transcript  
October 21, 2012



Kingdom Life is a Controlled Life  
Murder - Adultery - Divorce  
Matthew 5:21-32

*This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on October 21, 2012, at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Pastor Scott Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio copy of the sermon on CD is available by request at (860) 563-8286.*

**Scripture Text**  
**Matthew 5:21-32**

<sup>21</sup> “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

<sup>27</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ <sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> 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.

<sup>31</sup> “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ <sup>32</sup> 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.

## Introduction

Murder. Adultery. Divorce. Welcome to our service this morning! I didn't come up with these topics. Jesus did. It is simply what comes next in the Sermon on the Mount. When you read about the Sermon on the Mount, you can't accuse Jesus of just talking about lofty religious matters that don't really intersect with every day life. You can't get any more closer to "every day life" than murder, adultery and divorce.

In my study for this Sunday, I came across a title for a book on the Sermon on the Mount and it was a most intriguing title, to say the least. The title went like this: *Did Jesus Use a Modem at the Sermon on the Mount?*<sup>1</sup> This book began with a little catchy poem that used words like "modem" and "fax" and "beepers." This book was written in 1997 and it is already out of date with its illustration. Here is my attempt to bring this catchy little poem up to date.

Did Jesus develop an App  
For the Sermon on the Mount?  
Did he ever try to broadcast a "Tweet"  
To send his message out?  
Did the disciples carry smart phones  
As they went about their route?  
Did Jesus develop an App  
For the Sermon on the Mount?

Think about the technological advances that have taken place in our society since 1997. In just fifteen years, we moved from a world of "beepers" and cordless phones in our homes to cell phones and smart phones, we can take with us wherever we go. You can watch video on your phone now. You can actually see who you are talking with on the phone. I never thought that it would even be possible to log onto a satellite with my cell phone and get directions to where I am going. And you can actually see on the map exactly where you are as you make your way to your point of destination. It makes you wonder what we will be able to do in the next 15 years that most of us aren't even dreaming about or considering possible. The technological advances that man is making are absolutely staggering. Imagine how staggering it would be to the minds of those Jesus was speaking to in the Sermon on the Mount. They would be blown away with our way of life we now call "normal."

And yet, in spite of all the "advances" man has made, some things never change. The topics Jesus spoke about in the Sermon on the Mount are just as relevant today as they were when he spoke them. For all the hi-tech sophistication of our world, we have done little to conquer these vices that plague our culture and find their way to the front page

of our papers every single day. I am not inclined to say that it is worse today than it was then because the heart of man has not changed. The fact that Jesus is talking about these issues tells us that they were prevalent then as they are now. But I will say this. These advances in technology, as good as they are, in many ways have poured fuel on these fires and it just feels like “murder” and “adultery” and “divorce” are burning more and more out of control with the aid of these so called “advances.”

See, what Jesus says in this sermon intersects with every day life. What Jesus has to say in this ancient book speaks to exactly where you live today in this hi-tech sophisticated world. I wonder. Do the words of Jesus intersect with your every day life? Or, are you just here for a religious experience that has little to do with your Monday to Saturday? Do you just sneak Jesus into a corner of your week, a corner relegated to Sunday morning? Is your faith just kind of characterized as a “way of belief?” Well, the Sermon on the Mount won’t let you stop there. The Sermon on the Mount, these incredibly relevant words of Jesus for today, calls you to a “way of life” that speaks very clearly to your Monday to Saturday. The words of Jesus transcend time and speak to where we live right now.

This should not surprise you, based on what we have said up to this point. We have already discovered in our study that Jesus is a rabbi. Rabbis interpret Torah, Old Testament Law. It is what rabbis do. It is not just their intent to tell their disciples what the Law of God means. Rather, it is their desire to show their disciples how to live based on God’s Law. That is the aim of their teaching and it is exactly what we find Rabbi Jesus doing in the Sermon on the Mount. Six times you will hear Jesus say in Matthew 5, “*You have heard that it was said to those of old . . . But I say to you.*” Now, don’t miss the point. When Jesus says, “*But I say to you*” he is not countering what God says in the Old Testament. Jesus is not “nullifying” or “discounting” the Old Testament Law. Rather, what he is doing is challenging the religious leaders and the rabbis of his day and how they interpreted the Law of God. He is basically saying to those who hear him, rather authoritatively, “Let me tell you what God really meant when he said ‘*You shall not murder.*’”

Here is the big difference Jesus brought to the discussion of how to live out the Law of God. The religious leaders of his day made keeping the Law of God a matter of keeping a bunch of rules. So to them, the keeping of the Law of God was all about what was done on the outside of man. It was all about the externals. But Jesus came along and said that keeping the Law of God does not just have to do with what everybody sees on the outside. Rather, the way of life that God intends for us has to do with addressing what is on the inside. Lets be honest. The inside is where we really live. And eventually, what is on the inside will spill out when the pressure is on. So when Jesus talks about “the way of life” that pleases God, he addresses what is living inside of us.

This morning we are going to talk about murder and adultery and divorce. Now I know what that looks like “on the outside.” But Jesus comes along and calls us to look at what murder and adultery and divorce looks like “on the inside.” And it doesn’t take long for you to discover that these sins we label as “biggies” are sins we all wrestle with in our hearts. All of a sudden the issues move from murder and adultery and divorce to anger and lust and weakened and hurt family relationships. All of a sudden you can hear Jesus talking directly to your every day life.

Now I understand that each of these issues are big issues and could become a series unto themselves. But here is what I want to do this morning. I want to take a brief look at each of these issues Jesus raises for us this morning. In doing so, I want to acknowledge how we all wrestle with these issues in our lives. I also appreciate that there are all kinds of external resources and practical steps to help us deal with things like anger and lust and family dynamics. Counting to ten before you speak is helpful. Loading accountability devices to your computer is helpful. There is a place for these things. But this morning, for each area we look at, I want to speak to the heart of the issue and appeal to the reason God speaks against anger, lust and the destruction of the family. By doing so, my prayer is that the Holy Spirit would help us gain victory over these areas by shifting the direction of our hearts and not just by modifying our behavior. We need heart change this morning. We need the Holy Spirit this morning. With all the advances of man, history and time have given evidence to the fact that nothing can change the heart apart from the moving of God in our lives. Kingdom of God, Come!

## **Murder and Anger**

Jesus begins by talking about murder. In verse 21 he says, “*You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’*” Obviously, the command “*You shall not murder*” is one of the Ten Commandments. In the Old Testament economy, the penalty for murder was death. We read in Numbers 35:31, “*You shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer, who is guilty of death, but he shall be put to death.*” In fact, long before Israel ever became a nation, after the flood of Noah, God said to Noah, “*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.*” So this is what was “*said to those of old.*” It was said, “*You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.*”

Why? Why was the penalty for murder so harsh? Why did God require a life for a life? The reason is given in Genesis 9:6. After Noah is told, “*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed*” the reason is given. It goes on to say “*for God made man in his own image.*” Human life is sacred because we bear the image of God. We read of the sixth day of creation in Genesis 1, after everything else was finely crafted, “*Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness. And*

*let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth' . . . And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish . . . and the birds . . . and every living thing.'*" In Psalm 8, David is feeling rather insignificant as he compares man to the vast creation of the universe. But then he says, "*Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands.*" As creatures bearing the image of God, we represent God in this world. Every person you meet, is marked with value. God has stamped his image upon every human being. Consequently, to take the life of a human being who bears the image of God is no small matter.

Perhaps the younger generation will know what I am talking about when I reference *The Hunger Games*. The first of three books in this series was made into a movie and pictures a grim world that pits the all powerful state against the individual. This all-powerful secular state divided its country into twelve districts and exercised complete control over life. Every year the state chose two people from each district to participate in a game called "The Hunger Games." It was broadcast on television and was much like Survivor or some other reality show, except the contestants were to fight to the bitter end and the only one left alive in the end was the winner.

The main character of the first book is a girl named Katniss. She volunteered for the game when her younger sister was chosen by lot to be her district's female representative. Katniss was quite the hunter to begin with, and her instincts served her well. As she was being groomed and prepared for these brutal games, she had the following conversation with a male friend of hers named Gale.

Gale said: "Katniss, it's just hunting. You're the best hunter I know."

Katniss replies, "It's not just hunting. They're armed. They think,"

"So do you. And you've had more practice," he says. "You know how to kill."

"Not people," Katniss says.

"How different can it be, really?" says Gale grimly.

Katniss then says, "The awful thing is that if I can forget they're people, it will be no different at all."<sup>2</sup>

That is the issue, isn't it? Even in a secular world, there is something recognized about the sanctity of life that is formed by the image of God. I think there is a danger in this secular world of losing sight of the sanctity of human life. Peter Singer, a Princeton secular ethicist has predicted that by the time we come to the middle of the twenty-first century "only a rump of hard-core, know-nothing religious fundamentalists will defend the view that every human life, from conception to death is sacred."<sup>3</sup> That is a scary

thing. Once you forget “they are people,” there is no intrinsic value to life and anything can become acceptable. When we lose sight of the sanctity of life, slavery can be validated. Abortion can be validated. The sex trade can be validated. Hatred can be validated. Abuse can be validated. “The awful thing is that if I can forget they’re people, it will be no different at all.”

Have you forgotten “they are people”? Here is the test. It is found in what Jesus says next. Here is the intent of what God meant when he said that we are not to murder. *“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.”* The root of murder is anger. It is hard not to wish ill against your fellow man if you have built up resentment and anger. When you call someone “a fool” or “an idiot” or “a jerk” in essence you show contempt for that person and you strip away their personal value in God’s eyes as image bearers. This, Jesus says, is akin to murder. How many times have we pulled the trigger and assassinated the image of God in our fellow man? Have we forgotten they are people?

There is not a person here who has not been offended by the actions of something done to them by someone else. No doubt, there are varying degrees of offenses and causes for resentment to build in our hearts. I don’t want to minimize them nor do I want to act as though some of these hurts aren’t egregious and downright wrong. But holding onto anger and resentment does nothing but hurt you. So what do I do with what I am feeling inside? I release it into God’s hands to do what is right. He is the judge. But I am also able to look at the one who has hurt me with compassion because I know that as I have been offended, I too have offended God. C. S. Lewis said, “To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you. This is hard. It is perhaps not so hard to forgive a single person great injury. But to forgive the incessant provocations of daily life---to keep on forgiving the bossy mother-in-law, the bullying husband, the nagging wife, the selfish daughter, the deceitful son---how can we do it? Only, I think, by remembering where we stand, by meaning our words when we say our prayers each night "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us."<sup>4</sup>

And so Jesus says, *“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.”* So instead of anger, Jesus calls us to be people who pursue reconciliation as much as it depends on us.

I am struck by what Paul says in Ephesians 4:29-32. In these verses, he tells us that we are to put away corrupt talk and anger and bitterness and wrath and slander. Instead, we are to be kind to one another. Right in the middle of these statements he said, *“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.”* Why does anger and slander grieve the Spirit of God? I think it is because out of love, the Triune created us with dignity and with the purpose of knowing and sharing pure love that comes from God. And then, out of love, Jesus humbled himself and became like us and died for us on the cross so that we could be brought back into that community of love. And so when we fail to love and see the image of God and value of human life, especially with brothers and sisters in Christ, it grieves the Holy Spirit. And so Jesus is saying to us, “True disciples not only avoid murder, but are transformed so that they do not strip away the personhood and identity of others through anger or defamation, and they continually produce reconciliation in offended relationships.”<sup>5</sup> When you look at people this week, see the image of God in them. It will cause you to treat them differently, even if they have offended you.

### **Adultery and Lust**

Next, in verse 27, Jesus says, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’”* Again, this is one of the Ten Commandments we find in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, adultery was defined as having sexual intercourse with mutual consent between a married or unmarried man and the wife of another man. From the very beginning, back in Genesis 2:24, we read of the special nature of the relationship between a husband and a wife. It says *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”* To “hold fast” to his wife indicates that marriage is founded on the idea of a lasting covenant. To “become one flesh” pictures the union of that covenant that is consummated through sexual intercourse between the husband and his wife. In Hebrews 13:4 we read, *“Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”*

This seems so out of step with our culture. To champion the ideal of the virginity of a bride and a groom on their wedding day is ridiculed and considered oppressive to the natural sexual desires we all have. I don’t have to belabor the point this morning, I just have to simply acknowledge the reality. There is so much freely available to us to feed our sexual desires that many, many even in the church, are struggling with this battle for sexual purity in their lives. This even gets magnified all the more when you see how Jesus defines adultery. He goes on to say, *“But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”* The proliferation of pornography in our culture has a choke hold on the lives of many men in our culture and in the church. We would do well to take the instruction of Jesus, who using hyperbole, basically says do whatever you need to do to get ahold of this issue in

your life. He says, “*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.*” You do what you need to do to get ahold of this. You find someone where this struggle can come out into the light. This is something worth fighting for in your life. Don’t let the fear of shame keep you from finding accountability in this. Your struggle is not unique to you. Find a brother in Christ who can help you. Get counseling if you need to. Whatever it takes, deal with it.

My desire this morning is to address this issue by getting to the heart of the matter. Why is adultery wrong? Why is sexual activity confined to marriage? Why is it detrimental to even indulge these desires if I don’t act out on them and involve anyone else? The old adage that says, “No harm in looking,” isn’t true. Why?

Here is what we have lost in our culture when it comes to sex. Sex does not mean anything anymore. In a college classroom, the class was discussing the book *Brave New World* by Huxley. The book describes a world where the purpose of life is the pursuit of pleasure, and meaningless sexual trysts are a regular form of pleasurable amusement in this book. In discussing the book in class, one of the students said, “Those people are disgusting.” The professor jumped on this comment because he wanted to make the point that sex ought to mean something. And so when he affirmed that thought, the student shot back and said, “No! Sex doesn’t always have to mean something.” What the student found disgusting was the way babies were produced in factories. That was disgusting to the thinking of the student. And rightfully so, I might add. But what the student failed to see was that his two statements— “Sex doesn’t have to mean something” and “Producing babies in factories without parents is disgusting”- are two statements that stand opposed to each other.<sup>6</sup> Sex does mean something.

We are not just biological and physical beings. We are emotional and intellectual and spiritual beings. Dr. J. Budziszewski says, “We were not designed for hooking up. We are designed for our bodies and our hearts to work together.”<sup>7</sup> We were made in the image of God. It is fascinating to me, that in the Old Testament when God addresses the idolatry of the people of Israel, he equates the worship of other gods to spiritual adultery. He calls Israel an “*adulterous wife*” in Ezekiel 16:32 and in Ezekiel 6:9, he condemns them for having eyes that have lusted after other gods. God had made covenant relationship with Israel and had committed himself to them. God’s love is a covenantal love that binds himself to the objects of his love. That is what love is. It is covenantal. We declare at a wedding ceremony what the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 5, that marriage “signifies unto us the mystical union that is between Christ and his

church.” God voluntarily binds himself and commits himself to us and we in turn to him. That is love.

“It is in the nature of love to bind itself, and this explains why sexual love must be circumscribed by mutually bonded self-giving. For love that does not bind itself is not love; it is something else.”<sup>8</sup> So girls, if a boy says to you, “if you love me you would sleep with me,” don’t believe him for a second and don’t fall for that. What he is proposing has nothing to do with loving you. He is loving himself when he says that. Until he is willing to sign on the dotted line and make public vows before God and man and commit himself to you until death do you part, there is no basis for love and sexual fulfillment. Don’t buy into the myth that you need to live together before you get married to see if you are compatible. You are not! It is not about “compatible.” It is about “covenant.” Love is found in a covenant that is made between a man and a woman and when that covenant is made, sex is glorious. It is glorious because it is shared with two people who are bound together with sacrificial love for the other. They are in it whether in sickness or in health, rich or poor, good times and bad times. Our faith and love for God rests in the promise that God will never leave us or forsake us. Even in the valley of the shadow of death, God is with us. Even when we sin, we confess and God is faithful to forgive. That is the basis for our love for God. That is the kind of love marriage is meant to portray. It is in that context God has designed this love to be expressed through the sexual union between a man and a woman.

So Jesus is saying, “True disciples not only shun physical acts of adultery, but are so completely committed to God’s purpose for marriage, that they have eyes and hands only for a spouse and discipline every thought and action to be singly focused on their spouse.”<sup>9</sup> If there is ever a time where kingdom values need to shine forth in our culture and offer an alternative to the cool-aid our culture is drinking it is now. We need men, Christian men, who are committed to sexual purity and who will have eyes and hands only for their wife. I told you the words of Jesus speak to every day life.

## **Divorce and Marriage**

This leads us to the last statement of Jesus we will look at this morning. In verse 31, we read, “*It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’*” In Deuteronomy 24:1, under Moses, God permitted divorce in the case of “indecency.” This law was designed to protect the sanctity of marriage, but it was also designed to protect women from the whims of a husband who simply didn’t want to remain married to his wife. So by the time Jesus comes around, the rabbis and the religious leaders had various interpretations of the Old Testament Law. The conservatives said that the only cause for divorce was adultery and some even said that adultery required the action of divorce. Others had a rather liberal view of what was

“indecent” and even claimed “bad cooking” as grounds for divorce. Jesus comes along and says, *“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.”*

The word used for “*sexual immorality*” is the word *porneia*. It is not the same word used for “adultery” found in verses 27-28. It does give you the idea that there is latitude for divorce in matters where there are severe violations of the marital relationship. But, at the heart of what Jesus is saying here, is that marriage is sacred and it should not be broken, except when the most extreme situations make it impossible.

Be careful you don’t have Jesus say something here that he is not saying. He is not saying that sexual sin requires divorce. There can always be the hope of reconciliation. He is not saying that where there is biblical divorce that one commits adultery by remarrying. Where there is biblical divorce there is that freedom to remarry, I believe. Furthermore, he is not saying that where there is illegitimate divorce and even illegitimate remarriage that there is no pardon or forgiveness. This is not the unpardonable sin. What he is saying is that marriage is sacred and should be fought for and preserved.

All the statistics point to the fact that stable families are the best incubators for the next generation. It is how God designed it to be. Children do better economically, socially and educationally. Children who grow up in married, two-parent families have two to three times more positive life outcomes than those who do not.<sup>10</sup> This is not to discourage families of single parents or families of divorce. God can and has done amazing things through your struggle and your walk of faith. But I also know most of you would say that it hasn’t been easy and it hasn’t been ideal and that there are extra hurdles and challenges you face.

Here is what Jesus is saying about kingdom life. True disciples not only respect the purity of the marital relationship, but have God’s values for the original design for marriage and are unreservedly committed to its permanence and sanctity.<sup>11</sup> So you live it. You champion it. You support it.

## **Conclusion**

The words of Jesus this morning really do speak to where we live every day. They go deep and they speak to the need we have for the Holy Spirit to do a work inside of us. My prayer is that you do not leave with just a few “behavioral modifications” to help you be “a better person.” Rather, I would like your heart to be turned towards Christ and that you would see the heart of the issue.

Are you struggling with anger and resentment and forgiveness and simply loving people? Ask God to help you see people as bearing the image of God and therefore of value. Ask God for strength to not grieve the Spirit by our resentments for the very people God has created and died for on the cross.

Are you struggling with lust and sexual sin? I would pray that you would gain an elevated view of the value of the sexual relationship and how it portrays the covenantal love that exists between God and man. It is a sacred expression of the kind of love God has for his church and for the love we have for Christ. Don't cheapen it.

Are you struggling in your marriage? If so, know that enduring through the struggle is good. Do your part to preserve the sanctity of your marriage. Men, turn your hearts to your wife. If you have walked through divorce, I pray that you would find the church to be your support and that your experience in marriage would not lessen your love for the ideal of what God has designed for marriage and the family.

---

<sup>1</sup>Ellis Bush Jr., *Did Jesus Use a Modem at the Sermon on the Mount* (Mukilteo, WA: Winepress, 1997) 7

<sup>2</sup>Timothy Paul Jones "By Bread Alone in *Salvo* Issue 22 Fall 2012 p. 62

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 63

<sup>4</sup>Davor Portland "The Psychology of Resentment" <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/10/17/the-psychology-of-resentment/>

<sup>5</sup>Micahel Wilkins *Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004) 256

<sup>6</sup>Terrell Clemmons "Sane Sex" in *Salvo* Issue 22 Fall 2012 p. 36

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 36

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 37

<sup>9</sup>Wilkins, 256

<sup>10</sup>Timothy Keller *The Meaning of Marriage* (New York: Dutton, 2011) 26

<sup>11</sup>Wilkins, 256