

“Did God Really Say...?” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Epiphany 6

February 12, 2023

- I. **Matthew 5:21-37** previously read
- II. **Did God really say that?**
 - a. You know we’ve all thought this before at some point... or maybe we’ve said it to someone in conversation about the Bible.
 - b. On the first level, this is a question about whether God said something that’s either hard to understand, or it might be something new to us.
 - c. On another level, it means, “I can’t believe that God said that...” or, “If God said that, I’m sure He meant something different.”
 - d. In the creation story, God created all things, including man and woman... and it was good.
 - i. Genesis 2:16-17 says, “¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’”
 - ii. Eve was created out of Adam right after this, and Adam and Eve were in paradise – the Garden of Eden.
 - iii. The rest of the story begins with Genesis 3, as the serpent asks Eve, “did God really or actually say not to eat from the trees of the garden?” (Genesis 3:1)
 - iv. Eve responded that it’s not all the trees, just the one God commanded not to eat from, or they would die...
 - v. And the serpent says, “You won’t surely die... your eyes will be opened to things you don’t know about!”
 - vi. Eve eats and so does Adam... and sin and evil were unleashed upon the world and humanity from that point forward.
 - e. Again, do you notice that the question was to raise doubt in Eve whether God meant what He said... whether God was being good in His guidance.
 - f. In just the same way today, we Christians read or hear the Word of God – it might be preached or taught – and we ask the same question as the serpent... “Did God really say...?” “Is that what God really means?”
- III. **Jesus is making our lives as Christians** very challenging in our Gospel.
 - a. Last week we read the introduction to His Sermon on the Mount, which included a description of His followers as salt and light.
 - b. This week we dive into several of the Ten Commandments and what they mean.
 - i. You might remember in Luther’s Small Catechism, he adds some explanation to each commandment – for example:
 - 1. The first commandment – “You shall have no other gods”

2. What does this mean? “You shall fear, love and trust in God above all things.”
 - ii. In today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus is taking the Ten Commandments that all good Jewish people would know and giving a much deeper understanding of what it means to actually follow them.
 - iii. At first glance, a person might read the Ten Commandments and feel mostly okay – saying things like, “I haven’t murdered anyone,” or “I don’t steal things.”
 - iv. However, when a person reads the Commandments from a keeping and breaking standpoint, it becomes clear that we are constantly failing to do God’s will.
 - v. An example of breaking the Fifth Commandment is to murder someone without just cause – you murder you break the commandment.
 1. You also break the Fifth Commandment if you fail to keep it by allowing someone who is in danger of dying to be ignored.
 - a. If you don’t help a person in harm’s way... it is a sin of omission... if you hurt or murder someone intentionally, it is a sin of commission – and both are sins against God.
- c. Jesus begins our reading today with a deeper understanding of the Fifth Commandment than those people had ever heard...
 - i. In fact, He begins with, “You have heard...”
 - ii. Jesus wants them to know what they heard about God’s will in their lives is not the same as what Jesus is now going to explain –
 1. You might think you know God’s Word says Jesus, but I AM God and the Word comes forth from ME!
 2. So listen up...
 - iii. You say don’t murder, I tell you that if you call someone an idiot or a numskull in anger – it is the same thing as murder.
 1. Wait, did God really say that?
 2. Yes, along with being reconciled to your brother before you come to worship (which today means before you come to the Lord’s Supper) because we don’t harbor grudges or hate and then come together in community like nothing is wrong!
 - iv. Jesus tells us murdering is not only committing a murder but a condition of the heart... ouch.
- d. Jesus then goes into the Sixth Commandment and adultery.
 - i. Again, Jesus tells them they don’t fully comprehend what this commandment means...
 - ii. You heard a man shall remain faithful to his wife... I AM God, and I tell you that even a lustful thought is breaking this commandment!
 1. Did God really say that? Did He really mean that?

- iii. God's standards for purity of heart and mind are constantly questioned – and yet He tells us the only way to experience sexuality is in the bond of marriage between a man and woman.
 - 1. He even goes to the extreme illustration of doing away with the part that is causing the trouble rather than end up going to hell over it... not literally of course, but take it that seriously!
 - iv. He then clarifies that when a man and woman divorce it is never good, but on the grounds of infidelity only... otherwise, any new person who comes along and marries them is committing adultery.
 - e. Finally, Jesus addresses oaths.
 - i. You might say this is about the Second Commandment, or "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God."
 - ii. In those days, people swore an oath by different things – like "I swear by... God in heaven, or Jerusalem, or by my head..."
 - 1. Each of these oaths might have a different level of importance, and might be broken if it were said in a certain way.
 - 2. Jesus says, let your words be yes or no, but don't deceive.
 - iii. In our words today, we often hurt others or fail to be accountable because we pretend we didn't mean them... we say, "What I meant by that was..."
 - iv. Jesus says, let your words be honest and truthful no matter what.
 - f. Did God really say... that we have to be perfect in all these things?
 - i. Yes, in the last verse of this chapter Jesus says, "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matt. 5:48 ESV)

IV. **How is that going for you?**

- a. Maybe you have some beads of sweat forming on your forehead after all this hellfire and brimstone... and maybe you are convicted to repent... good, this is what God wants.
- b. However, more than anything, I have good news for you today.
 - i. As Jesus pronounced these most difficult commandments, we are all the more driven into His arms for the forgiveness we so desperately need.
 - ii. Jesus knows the challenges and struggle with living a godly and obedient life... along with the sinful nature that constantly troubles us.
- c. In our baptisms and faith, Jesus did something we could never do for ourselves... He placed His white robe of righteousness upon us and took the sin which condemns us upon Himself.
- d. The good news is that we are condemned and without hope because we can never live up to God's standards in our sin, but Jesus loves us so much that He allowed the people of this world to nail Him to a cross... the cross was where Jesus became sin so that we who believe in Him might live in forgiveness.

- e. As 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For our sake [the Father] made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”
- f. Even in our utter failure, praise God that He always leads us home to Jesus
- g. Did God really say that...?
 - i. Yes, God really does give us forgiveness, life, and salvation – the promise is true. Amen.