

## **How Is It With Your Heart?**

Matthew 5:21-37

### **Intro. Illustration.**

Years ago I worked as a teacher. I remember very well one of my students. He came from a wealthy and educated family and like many students he was capable and intelligent however for whatever reason this student's behavior was a challenge for us and a problem for his family. He was always involved in fights with his classmates and we constantly had to take him to the counseling office and many times even to the principal. Classroom and school rules, detentions, extra homework and counseling just didn't work with him. There was only one thing that made this student listen, pay attention and work on his studies. When things were really bad and the student was out of control, we called his dad. I was present in one of the meetings with the dean, the student and his father. I noticed that when the dean was sharing what was happening with this student his dad lowered his head. It seemed to me that this dad looked like he was ashamed or sad. I imagine that more than sadness this father was experiencing a deep love for his son but at the same time he felt so helpless. His only words in the meeting were "How I can help my son?" He wasn't upset, he was worried, but he expressed that with such love and compassion. I remember my student's face; tears running down his face. He was moved by the love of his father but more than anything else, more than rules or detentions, the love of the father was able to change my student's heart. That love also changed his son's attitude and performance.

This is exactly what I found in today's gospel passage.

## **Bible Context.**

Bible commentator Matthew Myer Boulton says; *In first-century Palestine, “the heart” was considered the central organ of a person’s thought, intention, and moral life. Let’s remember “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”*

According to Jesus, the human heart is the first part of our being that has to be surrendered to God. It is the heart that is first on the list of important elements that compose human nature.

Myer Boulton also says: *“This “greatest commandment” is the key to unlocking this week’s section of Jesus’ sermon. For if “all the law and the prophets” hang on the twofold love of God and neighbor, then we should interpret any particular law as a way of living out that love - and doing so, please note, “with all your heart.” That’s precisely what Jesus is up to here: not “ratcheting up” or “internalizing” the law, much less creating a new one, but rather expounding on the law in light of the heartfelt love that is, after all, the point of the law in the first place.”*

## **Theological Analysis.**

The ancient law exposes the condition of the human heart. John Wesley once said *“Hence there is in the heart of every child of man, an inexhaustible fund of ungodliness and unrighteousness, so deeply and strongly rooted in the soul, that nothing less than almighty grace can cure it. From hence naturally arises a plentiful harvest of all evil words and works; and to complete the whole, that complex of all evils.”* Wesley believed that the human heart needed to be cured by the grace of God *because* the love of God in the human heart is a powerful force capable of transforming our human nature. How can we understand and live the commandments of God filtered by the words, the person and the life of Jesus Christ? How can we ask of ourselves or others a right

behavior? Many believe that in order to live a life that pleases God we need just to obey God's law, However as the apostle Paul said...I will show you a still more excellent way...Love. We have a God that loves us so much and it is precisely because of Her love that... **God is able to transform our hearts so we can live a life full of love, love for God, love for all people and love for all God's creation.**

### **Application.**

It is only in Jesus that we all can experience the reality of God's love in our lives. Obedience to the law then is the result of our response to the manifest and profound Love of God. Do you remember how my student was moved to change and transform his behavior all because of the love and compassion shown by his father? More than a law to follow, God wants us to experience his transformative love in order to live a fruitful and servant life.

Jesus spoke about murder, immorality, unfulfilled oaths...and all of that represents the same problem, a heart that is far away from the divine. As humans we need to recognize that we must get closer to God and when we do our hearts will be impacted by the love that transforms our lives.

Let's examine the most dramatic of Jesus' examples, murder. *Jesus goes to the root of this horrible act, the underlying disposition that gives rise, first to antagonism, then to hatred, abuse, injury - and finally to homicide.* The problem is in the human heart.

Today is the perfect day to present our lives to God, to sincerely reflect on the condition of our hearts. We may or may not pass the test of moral purity or religious cleanliness. We might think that we don't have much to confess to God especially since we haven't committed such scandalous sins as murder or sexual immorality, however we all need to purify our hearts from the things that lead us to hate a person or have an insane desire in our soul. The Love of God can

move our life from indifference to compassion, from hate to care, from coldness of heart to a warm heart that loves and serves everyone, from selfishness to generosity, from individualism to community thinking, from "I am first" to "God is first..."

Let's remember... **God is able to transform our hearts so we can live a life full of love, love for God, love for all people and love for all God's creation. It is God's love that can produce obedience to His law, and it is only God's power that can lead us to be His disciples that will transform the world. Amen!**