

Small Group Notes – 12th February 2017

Ice Breaker (optional)

For you, what is best and worst about winter weather?

Theme: Murder, Adultery & Divorce

Readings: Matthew 5:21-37

Sermon Outline

Not the easy parts of the Sermon on the Mount, e.g. the beatitudes or about being the salt of the earth! This is tougher to hear. Jesus gets down to the nitty gritty stuff – adultery, divorce and even murder.

There are many different interpretations – e.g. Luther's view was that this was just aimed at clergy, with a set of impossible demands, or this is a vision of the future kingdom of God. We may not all agree with today's approach.

We must not take this out of context – it is part of the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew presents it as a parallel to Moses giving the 10 commandments at Sinai. Jesus applied them to new situations – the law was supposed to evolve. Also the next verses (43-48) tell us we must love our neighbours, not just those who love us.

This is not just a morality lesson. It's wrong to read this as meaning divorce is prohibited so you must stay in a relationship at all costs. Also wrong to see this as purely historical – when women had no status and divorce might leave them destitute.

- Jesus joins the dots. Anger may lead to murder. Outward acts are judged by man; inner thoughts are judged by God. But Jesus doesn't say "don't get angry", but when you do, sort it out, be reconciled before it gets out of hand.

- Similarly, adultery starts with lust, a wrong attitude to another. The eye symbolises a way of seeing; the hand what you may do.
- v. 31 is trickier! We must see it in context. The law said any man could divorce his wife if he gave her a certificate giving the reason – even if just to get a "better model"! This isn't talking about those who've tried and failed. (Read v. 31-32 in The Message.) It contrasts legal and moral responsibility.
- Jesus instruction on swearing is not about profane language, but calling on God to witness the truth of your statement. This is not necessary if you tell the truth all the time.

We must remember Matthew's audience – the early church. He was emphasising discipleship over the law – obeying rules is not enough. For us, "all have sinned" (Romans 3 23-24) but we are justified by grace. Being angry, lustful, dishonest can lead to worse behaviour – we need to sort them out before it is too late. But we must not use this to be critical of others or marginalise them by saying divorced people should not remarry, women should not be priests, gay people have no place in church, ... We must interpret passages within the message of Jesus' love. The Bible is more than a rule book. These verses should not drive a wedge between us or causes us to criticise others, but help us to strive to be better – less angry, more respectful, more truthful.

Questions of Application

- 1) Who do you lose your temper with, and how do you sort it out?
- 2) Is it easier to apply these instructions to other people, or to yourself?
- 3) How do you react to the instruction to gouge out your eye, etc?
- 4) Are you always completely honest, both in what you say and what you do not say?
- 5) How can we come closer to following the spirit behind this passage?