

Stadium Village Church

October 16th, 2005

God's Plan For Abundant Living

Sermon: Exodus 20: 13 Num. 35:30, 33-34 Mt. 5:21-24 (Gen. 4:8-12,9:6,)

What is Murder?

For the past several weeks we have looked at God's Agreement or Covenant with the Jewish people. I was glad to hear that some of you telephoned your parents as a result of hearing about the fifth Statement God gave to Moses about honoring our parents.

But my heart was so heavy when I heard the news from Hastings MN, a small town less than an hour south on the river. A 17 year old shot and killed his own parents. He offered to pay his friends to help him. It was premeditated and tragic.

This could be an easy crime to forget, after all it happened in a different town. It was only two people who died. All sins are disgusting, but this one makes those of us who understand the sacrifice parents make for their children, particularly hard. *Honor your father and mother, so that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.*

We see the antithesis of this law in the murders of a father and mother by their son. (May God have mercy on these young men!)

Today we will look at the actual act of murder in the Hebrew Bible, this sixth command is only two words: No Murder. *Lo Tirazach.*

Listen to the simple words of this statement in English:

Exodus 20:13 You shall not murder.

What is murder? And, (although it may appear to be obvious,) why Shouldn't we murder?

Now, how many of you committed murder this past week?

If you had ended the life of someone this past week, you probably wouldn't be sitting here today.

But let's look at what that Hebrew word meant to the ancient Jews and what it means for us today. (By the way, These are the three questions any good Bible student will ask themselves when studying the Bible: What did it say to them, What does it mean, What does it say to me now?)

The word murder in this list of laws is RATZAH. Listen carefully to what it does not mean. You shall not murder, does not say: You shall not Kill. There are other Hebrew words meaning to kill. God, in the Old Testament, even commands the people to kill: Kill the enemy in battle, kill animals for

food, kill in self-defense and kill murderers. So this statement about murder does not address capital punishment or conscientious objectors in the military.

You shall not murder to the Hebrews meant that you shall not illegally kill a person so that the community is harmed. There are times when a community is helped by killing, such as when a person runs around destroying people and property. Stopping them, perhaps by killing them, would help the community. In war, the situation is similar. From the Numbers 35 passage, we read that God wants murderers to be killed so that the land will be purified from the murder. Do you see a conflict here? God wants the murderer killed, yet God says we shall not Murder. How can we resolve this tension?

Numbers 35: says:

30 "Anyone who kills a person is to be put to death as a murderer only on the testimony of witnesses. But no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.

33 "Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it.

Remember that the Ten Commandments, as we call them are not technically commandments. They are God's vision for what his people, a perfect people, a nation of priests, will look like. God covenants or promises to be their God if they will obey him. They will worship only God and not make or worship idols. They will not misuse God's powerful name. They will remember the Sabbath rest day and keep it Holy & set apart. They will honor their parents.

However, God, who knows all about us, knows that we will not always live perfectly. So, God has made, as Philip Friesen's calls them, accommodating structures that get us out of our messes. You might call accommodating structures plan b when God's perfect plan a fails because of human sin.

When America's great Evangelist Billy Graham's wife, Ruth, was asked if she ever considered divorce, her response was, Divorce? Never. Murder? Yes.

We sometimes use the words murder to get our point across. As an angry parent I used to say, I'm going to murder you or kill you if you don't do such and such. Some one graciously corrected me. Those are strong words that shouldn't be used. For God hates murder.

What was God's plan b for humans who murdered?

Although God desired that murder would never happen, he made an accommodating structure, plan b, in case it did. Anyone killing a person must be put to death. But if he can run to one of the six cities God

ordered established in Israel, called a City of Refuge, then he could stay there until a fair trial was completed. This would protect the suspect from the other family's blood revenge.

For many of us the idea of blood revenge is foreign.

Here is an true example of blood revenge. If someone killed your brother, say, in a car accident, to uphold the honor of your family, you would have to go and kill a member of the driver's family. A life for a life. Justice is done. We may feel like doing this, but our society does not permit it. But for societies where there is no strong government, this system continues today

The Bosnian conflict in the Balkans in the 1990's is an example of blood revenge conflict for over 900 years. An eye for an eye. A life for a life.

This system of blood revenge was operating in Biblical days. But God's law, you shall not murder, was meant to break that vengeful cycle.

God hates murder. Why?

Why did God want the Jews to not murder? And, why does God not want us to murder today?

There is one main reason and two subsequent reasons why we must not murder.

The main reason why we must not murder is that

1. God has made humans in God's Image. Therefore humans have divinity as part of their being and have value as determined by their maker, God. Killing a person destroys the highest and most valuable, most precious creation of God. Murder destroys God's Nature & His Majesty.

The 2nd, though subsequent reason we must not murder is that:

2. God has created humans and if we destroy a human life than we are putting ourselves in God's place as the giver and taker of human life. We are usurping or stealing God's Sovereignty, God rules over life.

3. And as a corollary to this: By killing another, we become the judge of whether that person should live or die. God alone is the judge of a persons' life.

*(John 8:50 (Jesus said:) I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the **judge**. Ac 17:31 For he has set a day when he will **judge** the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.") 3. God warned of Tree of Knowledge of Good & Evil. = we could/would judge)*

A human's life must begin and end with God's determination. It is not for any person to create or destroy life.

Just yesterday we were visiting a famous professor. He is so

incapacitated. He would just love to die. We are praying that he would die quickly. It would be very easy for the doctor to give him extra morphine and he would quickly die. It is so tempting. But this is not our decision Neither euthanasia (killing of the sick and elderly), parricide, suicide, homicide, or feticide (killing of the unborn) are part of our job descriptions. Creation of life and death are God's blessed acts alone. What a relief for us not to have to decide the yes and no of who lives or dies.

But in fact, we are faced with these choices today. Pull the life support plugs, birth control aids, abortion, withholding food, ...how close to the murder line are we progressing, or are we already there? What would a nation of God's priests say about these issues? What can the Church do? What will you or I do, or what have we already done that has crossed God's boundaries for abundant living?

You shall not murder

I still remember being on the floor with my children & their friends and trying to play one of the first TV video games. It was like a pac man game where one little circle gobbles up another one. I am pretty nimble with my hands, and I managed to move the stick around pretty well. But every time that little circle came and ate another one I felt like I was being killed. I started hyperventilating. I screamed, I sweated, I jumped around. I finally had to stop because I couldn't take the destruction.

I think about that sometimes when I see the computer games that kill real looking people today. According to a study of 600 eighth- and ninth-graders, students not normally prone to aggression are nearly 10 times as likely to get into a fight after playing a violent video game. (Christianity Today, October 2005, Vol. 49, No. 10, Page 31)

I should mention TV too. The average child watches 8,000 televised murders and 100,000 acts of violence before finishing elementary school. That doesn't include the movie violence.

(<http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/violence.html>)

Why are we doing this to our society? Remember I said that God is interested in the well being of the community. You shall not murder concerns harmful acts against the community. Brothers and Sisters, we have an obligation to protest.

Perhaps you don't have time to rise up against the powers in media, but we can refuse to watch or play these mind killing, soul dissolving, spirit numbing visuals that murderously reduce a god given, infinitely and eternally valuable life to a throw away, worthless commodity.

Whether it is TV, the cinema, pornography, or violent video games, stop watching them. You will save your own life and perhaps that of someone else.

I know it's counter culture. I know that sometimes a choice is not clear cut or easy. Sometimes I don't know what to think.

But when I don't know what to think, I turn to my Lord. What would Jesus do? And what did Jesus say about murder?

Let me first say, that the first four of God's Statements or Commands about who God is and how I should respond to God, are deep and holy challenges. But, to be honest, I think that really they are not so hard to follow and keep. I like the first four, even the honor your parents is a little tougher, but hey, If I just keep my mouth closed and if I am sweet and respectful, and you know, I really love my parents, yea, I think I have that law in control.

But these next five commandments, well hopefully the adultery one... well...that's one I don't plan on breaking...these next how to's for living, or Commandments, if you call them that, these are getting too close to home. I really don't want to touch these, because I just heard what Jesus said about them, and I already feel guilty!

Jesus said don't get angry without a just cause, don't call someone a name, and don't judge a person by cursing them.

Matthew 5: 21 (Jesus said:) "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'

22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' (Idiot) is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says (curses), 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,

24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

So let me get this straight, Jesus. You say that even if I get angry then that's as bad as murder? Wow! And if I call someone a name which might make them angry, not to mention emotionally wounded, that too deserves a trial by the high council? And if I curse someone and call them a fool, in other words I am judging them, then that might send me to hell?

See why I knew that these how to's for living might be a little difficult?! Jesus is not only talking about the action of anger. he is talking about the root of anger which is the root of murder. The root is lack of love. The root is self-centeredness. The root is pride.

Jesus is calling us from being rule followers to transformed lovers whose very thoughts and attitudes are like his.

If we try to get to the root of anger, I believe we will find pride. We think our way is the best way. It can begin with little things, like who gets to control the TV channels. Anger's second root comes from selfishness, in other words power. Who has the control. Anger often results in physical damage, which is not surprising, because the word anger comes from the Latin word for strangle!

The second statement by Jesus about the roots of Murder, elevates the crime. I understand that because the punishment goes from just a judgment in the instance of ANGER to trial before the High Council, the Sanhedrin. Jesus says that Name Calling warrants a greater judgment, for Calling someone an Imbecile or an idiot, a moron, is attacking their very soul. Remember a person is made in the image of God and deserves respect and dignity. Damaging their emotions by name calling degrades their essence.

Nancy Adams, our guest today, so poignantly describes this kind of murder in her poem:

Playground Execution

her name was Rosemary - her fatal flaw was poverty of coolness - thick unwieldy
ugly glasses
untended hair - a smile too eager - baggy ankle socks as if they knew her future -
thin dress one size too small - but the smell of her, - it, - above all, was - like blood to
sharks - - the mob converged - no jeers can cut as deep or scar so well - as
childhood jeers - raw mocking jaws - through baby teeth - unvarnished truth as
recess juries see it
the judgment falls
her life will never be the same
or ours
the innocence of baby trust of life
now changed and maimed as open
mouth and hot sweet tears
mark the mind
mark the mind
keen remorse suddenly strikes
the wanting the comfort of the crowd
at all cost of careless toss and loss of humanity
mark the mind
sorry, rosemary

Have you experienced the pain that Rosemary felt? The ugly words that attack the soul, even the spirit of a beloved child of God.

Yes, The deepest damage we can do to a person, is to destroy their spirit. Judging them by calling them a fool. To Westerners, fool does not seem too degrading. But I know that to Asians, this is the worst name a person can be called. By calling someone a fool, I have determined their character and have condemned them to hell. Jesus says this very act

results in my own judgment to hell.

Murder destroys a life, But words can also destroy a person, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Jesus calls his followers to a higher level than just outward good living. Jesus calls us to righteousness.

Rightness within, deep down pureness.

Don't bother to come and worship God, Jesus says, unless you have reconciled with others.

Those two relationships: us with God and with others must be clear and clean. We can't take the path to God if we are blocked by a box labeled murder. And inside,... that box is filled with anger, bitterness, judgment and unforgiveness.

Just now we will join Jesus at His table. I've heard it said that it is difficult to be angry when we eat.

If you are honest with yourself about today and all your yesterday's, is there someone you are angry with? Could it even be God? Think deeply and honestly. Whom must we forgive? We can't come to this table unless we have reconciled with someone who has wounded us or whom we have wounded.

Please take time now to ask God to forgive you and help you. Go to that person. Perhaps it's your spouse or parents, or sibling. Perhaps your boss or co-worker. We heard what Jesus said. It's not hidden instructions. Perhaps you need to return to someone who was on the playground. Before we eat with Jesus, let us go in our minds and be reconciled to that other person. Then actually do it today. This is for the benefit of the land. This is for the benefit of the Community. This blesses us. This is very serious. Sin and broken relationships were the reasons that Jesus died on the cross.

Prayer

We thank you Father God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit, that you know all things. You have created all things. You are always present, even in the difficult and ugly times of our lives.

You knew from the beginning about our sin. You planned a way of escape. We know that we must cooperate with you in this plan.

Help us today to realize to whom we must speak so that we can be freed from our murderous past.

Help us today to realize that we must also speak to you, Jesus. Because it is our anger, our cruel criticisms and judgments that put you on the cross. Thank you for the gift of forgiveness and for the gift of restoration. We are sure that what you have said is true:

Come all who are burdened with sin and problems and Jesus will give you rest.

Believe Jesus and receive Jesus. Then we will find abundant living.
Thank you Jesus. Thank you.

With thanksgiving let us offer God our grateful praise!

The Lord be with you.

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