

Make Friends Quickly

Matthew 5:21-26

Turn to Matthew 5. Our text today is Matt 5:21-26. I call this, "Make Friends Quickly."

All the way through the Sermon on the Mount, remember the beatitudes that began the Sermon. The paragraph we'll read today could just as easily begin with "blessed are," because it shows us how we'll live when we're meek, when we're merciful, when we're peacemakers. But it does not begin with blessing, because it is also a warning.

The beatitudes together describe the followers of Jesus with two main characteristics. One, we come before God understanding that we depend on his great kindness to us. We don't deserve good things from him. We need his kindness. Two, we treat people with that same kindness. We treat people the way God treats us.

These two traits: that we stand before God needing kindness from him that we don't deserve, and that we treat people with kindness they don't deserve, are a single unit. In the beatitudes, and in the Sermon on the Mount as a whole, they are always together. Both are essential.

We do sin, we fail at this, and the Lord's Prayer assumes that we will need undeserved forgiveness every day, just as others will need our undeserved forgiveness every day. But Jesus' teaching here is that our kindness to people who don't deserve it, is just as important as our depending on God's kindness.

When we live like this, we receive the kingdom of God, we are re-born into God's family, we are saved, we receive eternal life.

This is why some parts of the Sermon are warnings. When we do *not* give ourselves to living this way, we take ourselves *away* from the kingdom of God. Dangerous! So, Jesus blesses us who will live this way, and he also warns us who won't.

The Six Antitheses – Matt 5:21-48

The rest of Matthew 5 is six contrasts. Each time, Jesus says, "you have heard it said, but I say to you." When he fills in "you have heard it said," he repeats something in the Law of Moses. And when Jesus says, "but I say to you," he revises it.

"You've heard this said in the Law, but now I am saying it to you a better way, I'm going to fulfill the Law, now I'm going to tell what the Law was after all along."

You have heard it said, “Do not Murder” – 5:21

Mt 5:21-22a *You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "Do not murder," and "anyone who murders will be judged." But I tell you . . .*

Do not murder refers to the sixth commandment, which in Exodus and Deuteronomy were not spoken by Moses, but by God himself. Jesus says, about words God himself spoke out loud to Israel at Sinai, "you have heard it said, but I tell you." For a Jew to say this is sinful and arrogant, and blasphemous.

It is a good thing that he just said that he did not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it, and that the previous paragraph Jesus held up the Law so strongly. Still, it is a remarkable line to use of God's words: *you have heard that it was said, but I tell you.*

If this is *not* blasphemous, it can only come from Someone who believes that they are the Voice of God. Either Jesus is a vicious deceiver, leading us away from God, or he is in truth the Voice of God.

If we decide to live by the Sermon on the Mount, we are agreeing that Jesus of Nazareth is nothing less than the Voice of God. He speaks the words of God. Only God himself has the right to say, *you have heard it said, but I tell to you.* Remember that this is the sermon on the *mountain*. In Exodus, God spoke to Israel from the *mountain*.

God gave Israel the ten commands from the *mountain*. In Matt 5:1 it says Jesus went up into a *mountain*, and he taught them. In Matt 8:1 it says he came down from the *mountain*. What God did in Exodus, Jesus did in Matthew. That's what Matthew the writer teaches us by telling it this way. The Sermon on the *Mount*.

Case 1: But I tell you, anyone who rages – 5:22

Jesus gives three short scenes in the rest of our paragraph, v22, vv23-24, and vv25-26. These three show us about the meek and merciful and the peacemakers.

In these three scenes, Jesus uses case law. Moses also used case law. Case law says, "if someone does this, you do that, if this happens, that should happen." Case law does not cover every situation. Not trying for that. Case law explains enough situations so that people can see what is important, and know what to do when a new situation happens.

Jesus' first two cases concern "brothers and sisters." Jesus has in mind that beatitude people will be together, and he teaches us how to live with each other. The third is not a brother, but someone in the general public who is has something against us.

V22 *But I tell you that anyone who rages against their brother or sister will be judged. Again, anyone who says to their brother or sister, "You idiot," is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

The old words, *Do not murder*, put a fence around anger and getting even. "Don't cross this line," it said to us when we're angry: *do not murder, or you'll be judged*. But the new words rule out anger and getting even entirely.

If I am angry enough to kill you, but I do not kill you, I just walk around raging and fuming, I would be okay under the old words, no judgment. But under Jesus' words, walking around raging and fuming, I am still heading for judgment.

Jesus uses legal language in this paragraph. It is hard to know what to do with this. What Jesus asks for from us is clear enough, but the legal consequences don't make much sense to us. But in the OT, if you were cleared by a law court, it meant you were cleared by God. If you were found guilty in a law court, it meant you were guilty before God.

We assume that Jesus uses legal language and court language as a way of describing how God views these things. So we will take it that being angry with a brother or sister is unacceptable in the kingdom, and calling someone an idiot or a fool is unacceptable in the kingdom.

This first case has in mind a situation where a brother or sister has offended us, has hurt or injured us. Jesus applies "blessed are the meek, blessed are the merciful" to this situation. We've received mercy from God, so we show mercy to others.

The old words, *do not murder*, did not say anything about attacking someone with your words. You could insult them, and tear them down with your words, by the literal meaning of the words, *do not murder*, and not be judged. But Jesus fulfills and completes the law, and getting even by hurting them with words does not fit into the kingdom.

It happens to all of us that someone does something that hurts us and infuriates us. Let's just assume that. We've been injured and wronged in some way, and we are in pain, we are insulted, and we are real angry. This happens to pretty much everyone.

What will we do then? That is the question. What then? Will we act to get even, or not? Is there some other voice inside us that guides us, a voice beside the pain and anger which tells us to get even?

The meek, those who don't fret about evil people, who refrain from anger, and turn from wrath (Ps 37), who leave it to God, will inherit the earth. The merciful receive mercy from God. Good news from God for you who are meek, Good news from God for you who are merciful, good news from God for you who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Case 2: If you remember they have something against you – 5:23-24

Vv 23-24 *Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother or sister; then come and offer your gift.*

The first case tells us what to do when we are angry with our brother or sister. This second case pictures our brother or sister being angry with us. We have done something to them. We're fine, but they are not fine. They are hurt and angry.

These words of Jesus show us what "good news from God for the peacemakers" looks like. We don't wait for them to come to us. We go to them to make it right. Jesus doesn't say how to make it right, but he's clear that we go to this brother or sister with one thing in mind: to restore the relationship. *First go and be reconciled to your brother or sister.*

But these sentences don't start with the offended brother or sister. They start with God. We come to God, we are about to bring a gift to God, and we remember the problem. Jesus seems to have Temple worship in mind. Jews who believed Jesus was the Messiah did keep worshipping at the Temple for some time. This is common in Acts.

This sermon is called, "make friends quickly." That comes from the third case, but in this second case also, Jesus urges us not to wait. You are about to bring your offering to God, to show your devotion to God, then you remember that someone else is upset with you. In this case, Jesus picks that particular time for us to remember, so we learn about God.

Jesus says, "if that happens, stop right there, go make peace with that brother or sister, and then come back and put your gift in the offering." This is case law. It is unlikely that we'll remember at the moment we're bringing our offering to God. The point is, God is more interested in us reconciling with our brother or sister, than he is in our gift.

The way best to show we love God, is to seek peace with our brother or sister. This can be desperately hard, my brothers and sisters. This can be very difficult. I don't know exactly what makes it so hard, but I've been in that spot, and it is hard. Jesus says, "do it, and don't wait."

And folks, when we go, it is not to defend ourselves, not to show them how they are really the wrong one, or how this isn't really my fault. I go to make peace. I go to speak in such a way that we are on good terms with them. You've probably had someone come to make peace with you, but it came with a lot of junk about you.

Let's not do that. If we are going in obedience to the Lord, to make peace, we will not preach or hedge. We will tell them what we did wrong, and we will tell them that we regret it, we wish we'd not done that. And that's it. What they do is their business. Some will be reconciled, some not. But you have gone sincerely. Now bring God your gift.

Sometime preachers apply this passage directly to the Lord's Supper. It applies to the Lord's Supper, but Jesus was certainly not thinking that. Jesus means *any* time we want to come before God. Our worship before God, our offerings and service to God, are bound up with our relationships to each other.

The beatitudes as a whole teach us to join God's kindness to us with our kindness to each other. *First go and be reconciled.*

Case 3: Settle quickly with your adversary – 5:25-26

Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Like case #2, we have someone angry at us, not us at them. It says nothing about "brother" here so it's probably not someone in the congregation. And again, like v22, there is all kinds of legal language here, and no one is sure how to take that.

It sounds like Jesus is just trying to keep us out of jail, and maybe he is. But I will focus on what he actually says we should do. If it keeps us out of jail, all the better! This is another teaching on "blessed are the peacemakers."

Two people who have a disagreement of some kind, and they are the way to court to have it settled legally. But the opening words of v25 in Greek sound more like restoring a relationship than making a legal settlement out of court.

Settle matters quickly, says Jesus, *do it while you are still on the way*. In two different ways, Jesus encourages us not to wait. If there is a problem with someone, don't delay dealing with this. *Make friends quickly*. *Do it while you are still on the way*.

Jesus spoke also like that in the 2nd teaching. Even if you are already in front of the altar, to offer your gift to God, and *then* you remember, *don't* put off being reconciled.

Leave your gift there, says Jesus, *first go* to the brother or sister and make it right, and then come back and offer your gift to God. God will not be dishonoured or insulted that you walked out for this. *First go*. He will be pleased.

Make friends quickly. That's the title I gave this message. *Make friends quickly*. Be reconciled, and don't delay. *Make friends quickly*.

Judgement

Jesus uses a lot of judgement language in this section:

But I tell you that anyone who rages at a brother or sister will be subject to judgment... anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell... Settle matters quickly ... or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Amen I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

I don't like talking like this. But this is Jesus not me. Jesus was clear about the good news from God, and he was also clear about not wanting the good news. If we don't want the good news, it's bad news.

The beatitudes are the narrow gate and the steep path. That's at the end of the sermon on the mount, and he's talking about these things. It is good for us to know this.

These three cases, the way Jesus explains being meek, and merciful, and peacemakers, can be very difficult. Sometimes it seems so unjust and unfair to be merciful, and be peacemakers. People can be such *jerks*. They are evil sometimes, and they do damage to us and others, they injure us. They don't deserve any mercy or forgiveness whatsoever!

That is all true, my brothers and sisters. It is every bit as bad as you think it is. Not always, but sometimes. But, God flooded us with undeserved kindness. In Matthew 18 Jesus tells of a slave who owed a king a huge amount of money, an impossible debt, 10 billion dollars. The king forgave him.

But that slave would not forgive another slave who owed him \$1,000, he had the fellow slave punished in court. The king found out, and was very upset, to say the least, and punished severely the slave who was forgiven but not forgiving.

No matter how much mercy and kindness we end up showing to others, Jesus said, it will be nothing to what God has shown you. Often this is hardest in our homes, in our families, where the same kinds of painful things happen again and again. This all can be very difficult. But the call of our Lord is clear enough.

Remember two things: one, if this is the kind of righteousness you want, ask for it, seek for it, knock on that door. Everyone who asks receives, everyone who seeks finds, and to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Good news from God for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, they will be satisfied. Ask for it, God helps.

Two, God forgives our sins. Every day we forgive each other, and every day God forgives us. That's how the kingdom of heaven works. Amen.

PRAYER: O God, I almost wish this was not so clear. It is clear, but we have a hard time with this. We humble ourselves before you. We love your mercy toward us, but often enough we are not merciful. We are not meek, we do not refrain from anger, and we are not peacemakers. But, God, sometimes we do get it right. We have sometimes done the right thing here. Thank you for that, for putting that desire in us, and helping us do it.

Father, we love your Son, Jesus the Lord. We want to live in his ways. We want to walk worthy of him. We want to live out all the beatitudes. Thank you for the clear call, thank you for forgiveness when we fail, thank you for our brothers and sisters who have forgiven us all those times, who have pursued peace with us. Thank you for your Spirit and your help. Thank you that you're our Father in heaven. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us, and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage our hearts, and strengthen us in every good deed and word. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.