

*You Have Heard...But I Say!*

Shepherd's Grace Church

February 16, 2013

<sup>21</sup>“You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup>But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire. <sup>23</sup>So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup>Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. <sup>26</sup>Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

<sup>27</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ <sup>28</sup>But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup>If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup>And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell. <sup>31</sup>“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ <sup>32</sup>But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

<sup>33</sup>“Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.’ <sup>34</sup>But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, <sup>35</sup>or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup>And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup>Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one. (Matt. 5: 21-37)(Also read 1 Cor. 3: 1-9)

What does it mean to belong to God? Today in Paul's letter to the Corinthians he asks that question. He says it is hard for the Corinthians to hear the question because they are still trying to decide if they even belong to each other! The people are engaged in a church fight. Some want to claim that Paul is the superior pastor. Others want to claim that it is Appolos! Paul is the founder of the church but as the

founder and one responsible to God for the planting of many churches, Paul does not stay. He gives a foundation for the faith and then moves on to let the people work out the fundamentals.

Appolos comes in to teach further and gives a hard line answer to the question we asked earlier. What does it mean to belong to God? For Appolos, there is only one answer! There is the law, the rule of law that is written in stone and is crystal clear! Some of the members of the church like this approach. They want to be pastored by someone who will tell them exactly what they should do and hold them to accountability for their actions. They like the idea of knowing there is a black or white and a clear right or wrong. They like the notion that others should be pointed to and accused and made example of for their shortcomings and failures.

Paul recognizes in today's reading, the difference between his teaching and that of Appolos. He says, I taught you as infants. I gave you only milk because you were not ready for the meat of the message. He says, they are still not ready. He says they are still not ready. He points to the immaturity of the argument as his rationale for withholding the totality of his teaching. He says he only gives them milk because they are not ready for the meat!

What does it mean to belong to God? For Appolos, and for some yet today, it means following a system of strict adherence to a set of rules rigidly interpreted where we are appointed to judge not only ourselves but also others and where people make claims of appointment based on these rules to condemn others for their actions and lack of faith!

We read about people who belong to God in this way today. Hardly a week goes by when the people of the Westboro Baptist Church are not in the news! Surprised? Isn't theirs exactly the faith Paul describes in his letter to the Corinthians? Isn't it their contention that there is a rigid set of rules God calls us to live by? Isn't it their contention that they are the ones best suited to interpret those rules? Isn't it their contention that those who violate the rules deserve their judgment, their contempt, and even their persecution?

We can all point fingers at the people of Westboro and agree that they are zealots in their interpretation. We can all recognize the extremes in their approach and we can all agree that their actions exceed what would seem to be their authority! We are frightened by their boldness and by the certainty of their actions. We are offended by the conclusions they have drawn because they seem to include all of us in their judgment. It is easy for us to respond in an outspoken way against their interpretation of sin because we do not want to be lumped in with the sinners!

What does it mean to belong to God? Would it surprise you to know that the fastest growing segments of church population today belong to non-denominational leaders who are willing to tell their congregants exactly what they are supposed to believe, how they are supposed to interpret it, and how others are wrong for interpreting differently? Most would be surprised by that claim but I believe it is true. People want...people like...people perhaps need to be told exactly what to do, when to do it, and how it will affect them and their lives! People are looking for truth and they are willing to believe others have it and can give it to them spoon fed! They are not ready for meat. They are only ready for the milk of their faith. They can hear the laws and they can be told how to interpret them but they are not ready to think for themselves!

Last week we heard from Matthew in 5: 20 that "Unless you have righteousness greater than the scribes and Pharisees you will never enter the kingdom of God!" Today, Jesus wants us to know exactly what that means! Today Jesus continues his sermon by meeting us exactly where Paul has led us! Today, Jesus wants to know if we are ready for more! He wants to know if we are willing to deepen our faith and trust in God by hearing the hard reality of God's laws! What does it mean to belong to God?

What does it mean, Jesus wants to know, to keep God's commandments? He tells us, he has not come to abolish the commandments, to abolish the law but to fulfill! He tells us that if we are not willing to keep even the least of the commandments, we will be regarded as least in the Kingdom of God! He tells us that if we teach others to break even the least of the commandments we will be least in the Kingdom of Heaven!

We hear these words and we are both confused and comforted! We are confused because we know the scribes and Pharisees. We know those who spend their lives interpreting scripture for us. We listen to their teachings and we find comfort in the absolute certainty of their conclusions. We like that certainty. We like the rock solid assurance that we are doing the right things and now we hear from Jesus. Not so fast! He says. The condemnation and consternation with which these "authorities" pronounce others guilty does not come from scripture, Jesus says!

These things, the way we work on the Sabbath, the way we view our neighbor, the way we view those who settle our disputes, the way we look at others, the way we look at our relationships, the way we look at our word; the authorities have added to these things and have made it impossible for us to maintain our righteousness and propriety! Are we ready for more? Jesus wants to know! He is eager to teach beyond the interpretation of our day and into the interpretation of our future but he wants to know? What does it mean to belong to God? What does it mean to go beyond the interpretation of

worldly power and move to the possibility of alternative interpretation of the law? What if the “law” was intended not for our detriment but for God’s desire to love us and engage us in consistent and continuous growth as people? What if the “law” is about these things? Jesus wants to know; Are we, are you ready for more?

Today in worship I wore my KU necktie. I have told many before that if they want an idea of what my message will be about that morning, all they have to do is look at my tie. I try to select from about 50 ties I own, many of which have been given me by members of the congregation, that have a theological message. Today, as people looked, many thought a part of my message might be a boastful WOOT! at KU’s 30 point victory over TCU the night before. Some even thought I might throw a lighthearted barb at my K-State friends in the congregation! (K-State having lost by 14 to a lowly Baylor team that KU easily beat both at home and on the road!)

The reality however is that I want to spend a few minutes illustrating Jesus’ question to us today by sharing from KU’s loss to K-State on Monday night! That’s right, I want to talk about a KU loss! There aren’t many of them during most years so it is rare when I can even use a loss to make a point but this week KU got beaten by rival K-State in Manhattan, KS! They lost by 3 points in overtime but that is not the point of my conversation!

From Last Saturday when KU easily won at home to the following Monday, just 2days, something happened to the KU team. On Monday night, when the Jayhawks suited up for the game with the Wildcats, it was announced that Jamare Traylor would not play for disciplinary reasons. Traylor is one of KU’s big men and is often counted on the spell Joel Embid. There was no explanation for Traylor’s disciplinary suspension, only that it was for conduct detrimental to the team and the university. At any rate, Traylor sat out the game!

During the game, Embid’s injuries, a fact known by competitors in the last 4 or 5 games, rendered him largely ineffective. His available replacements, Lucas and Black found themselves in foul trouble and in the overtime period, K-State was able to consistently penetrate the interior of the KU defense! They scored at will and won the game!

My point here is not to lament the loss, but to invite you to see the parallel between the action of the KU team and the disciples in Jesus’ *Sermon on the Mount!*” In Matt. 5: 19, Jesus tells us that those who fail to obey the least of the commands of scripture and who teach others not to obey will be regarded as the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who keep the commands will be regarded as the greatest!

What Jesus does not say is that those who fail to keep the commands will be kicked off the team. They will presumably receive an appropriate discipline BUT...BUT!!!...and I really need you all to hear this; **THEY WILL NOT BE KICKED OFF THE TEAM!** Even those who break the commandments will not be kicked off the team! Even those who interpret the rules so rigorously as to judge others, as long as they interpret only the rules as they are given will not be kicked off the team. They will be the least of the Kingdom, but they will be part of the Kingdom!

I can promise you that on Tuesday morning after the K-State loss, when Bill Self had all the KU players attention as they reviewed the game from the night before, he had the statistics for the KU big men up on the board. He would have pointed to the statistics for Perry Ellis, for Joel Embid, for Black and for Lucas and then he would have looked directly at Jamare Traylor. He would have said, I am not saying we lost the game because of you, Traylor, but I sure would like our chances better with you! You cost us a chance to win...now get back out and get to work! Are you ready for more? You belong to the team! You are a Jayhawk! What does it mean to belong to God?

Self didn't kick Traylor off the team! Traylor was still part of the team! He may have been made to feel like he was the least for awhile but he was still part of the team! That is what Jesus is saying to us today. He points to us and says, you know what, you are not responsible for the salvation of the world. We may not have been able to win that person who say you when you disobeyed one of the least of the commandments but I like our chances a lot better with you. Are you ready for more? You belong to me and I belong to you!

So what does it mean to belong to God? What does it mean to go beyond what we are given in written word and understand what is at the heart of the Law? The Pharisees and scribes did not know. All they knew was the exact and rigorous interpretation they and other leaders had imposed on the Law and they could tolerate no deviation! They had no tolerance for weakness in others and they could not see sin in themselves. Jesus says that to belong to God, to be part of the Kingdom, we have to move beyond this!

It is written, "You shall not murder." If you murder you are liable to judgment! Most of us have no problem with this and I believe it is exactly why Jesus starts here. Surely we can all agree murder is wrong. Wrongness so egregious as this must be judged and punished. Jesus, however, takes this command a step further. He says that to be a disciple, to be a part of the Kingdom we must manage our anger. He says that if we are angry with others we must resolve the anger.

In the beatitudes it is written, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Jesus calls us to be changed, to be blessed as peacemakers. He calls us to resolve our differences not by pretending the conflict does not exist but by sitting down with our brothers and sisters and actually talking out our differences. His statement is that we must first resolve our differences with people and then come to God! Peace making does not imply an absence of conflict but a resolution of conflict. Peace-making is reconciliation not just restitution.

Jesus says we should not insult others in our attempts to hide or cover our anger. To do that is to demean their faith and their sense of what is right. Disputes are to be resolved first by the parties involved and if not in that way, then by the council. Here, Jesus goes a step further. He suggests that to call someone a fool is to make yourself liable to the Hell of Fires. First century Christians would have understood this! To call someone a fool was to imply that they did not know or in fact denied the existence of God! It was to call them an atheist! We do not get to determine the level of another's faith. We do not get to determine the rightness of the Westboro Baptist Church! We get only to practice our own faith and reconcile ourselves to our brothers and sisters quickly.

How do we reconcile ourselves to people so closed minded as those of the Westboro Baptist Church? How do we resolve our differences with them? We probably don't. The reality is that most of us see them as so far from us as to understand our differences as irreconcilable. What then do we do? We work to move to the margins where voices are being denied and we give voice to all so all opinions can be heard and so no opinion is stifled. While that sounds easy, we quickly recognize that there will be others who disagree with us as well! What does it mean to belong to God? Are we ready for more?

If we are ready, Jesus brings it! You have heard it said that you shall not commit adultery! Once again most can agree that adultery is a sin to be avoided. To cheat on wives or husbands is not something we intend when we stand before God and the congregation and make a covenant of fidelity. Our intention is good and we agree...that is until Jesus says, "Are you ready for more?" If you look at another woman with lust in your heart, you have already committed adultery with her! What does it mean to belong to God?

The Pharisees and scribes were willing to let a literal interpretation of the law apply in this case. No person should be with another married person. Why wasn't that good enough? Why does there have to be more? Why in this day and age where every advertisement on television puts sexuality on display to entice us does there have to be more? How are we to avoid the temptation? How are we to avoid the lust? How are we to avoid the covetousness? WE live in a world where the world does not want us

to avoid the lust for sex because the world uses that lust to create another lust, a lust for possession! The world makes us believe that if we buy things as possessions we will somehow gain the sexuality of people as possessions.

The real sin here, Jesus says, is in covetousness! The desiring of things and the confusing of things with people. People are not to be lusted after like objects. To look at a woman or a man and desire that person just for their appearance is to treat that person as less than! To lust after a person is to somehow believe that you are superior to that person and because of your superior wealth or power or position you can possess that person. That is adultery! Adultery is the breaking of a vow, a covenant that is sacred because it is made before God and before another person who is your equal. Adultery forces us to say that others are somehow inferior and that we have the power, the authority to change the "Law" which we made covenant to keep! Jesus says, "I have come, not to abolish or change the law but to fulfill it!" Are we ready for more? How can we be?

The truth is, we are not and we cannot be on our own, but we can succumb to God's gracious offer as we humble ourselves and recognize that we are sinners saved by Grace alone! We are not worthy but Christ is worthy and in him we can appeal to God for more! We can take on more not because of what we do but because of what God can do in us. We are in the world but we do not have to be part of the world if we are willing to accept the gift of Jesus Christ as our savior and our redeemer. We can be reconciled to our shortcomings not by our own strength but by the strength of God in Jesus Christ. Are we ready for more? What does it mean to belong to God?

You have heard it said that if a man wants to divorce his wife he should give her a decree of divorce! In Hebrew, the decree is called a Ghet. (Pronounced get) The decree requires no communication. It is simply dropped at the woman's feet and that action completes the transaction. Divorce is allowed within the culture but as is pointed out in Mark's gospel, it is allowed as a concession to Moses for the people because of their lack of discipline. Jesus now wants to know if we want more. What does it mean to belong to God?

I admit that I struggle with His response year. You have heard it said, but I say to you that if you get a divorce you cause your former spouse to commit adultery. I struggle on two levels. The first is that I struggle as a divorced person. I stand before you as a divorced person today and recognize that divorce is not God's best solution to issues of relationship. It grieves me deeply that I was unable to live into the best God had planned for me and that I choose divorce as a solution to my personal problems. It grieves me because I know many of you suffer the same sense of condemnation I do as I read this portion of

scripture. I know you love God as much as I do and you want to serve Him in great ways. Now you hear that your solution to your situation was not the best part of God's plan. How can you...How can I...How can we participate in the coming of the Kingdom of God when we have not lived in to the best of God's plan for us?

I struggle...I struggle and then I remember! Those who break even the least of the commandments and teach others to do likewise will be least in the Kingdom. I struggle and then I remember Jamare Traylor! He is still on the team! He is not kicked off! He is still a part of the passion and the purpose that is designed to win a national championship! He is still a part of all the plans! He is still a part of all the hopes! He is still a part of all the dreams because he is still on the team.

I struggle and then I remember that I am not kicked off the team either. Jesus still wants me. He wants me to reconcile myself to Him and to do my very best. He wants me to recognize what is so easy to forget! We are all part of God's kingdom if we turn to Jesus and ask for his Grace. I am part of the kingdom! I am still on the team! I am part of the purpose and the passion because I cannot accomplish all God wants me to accomplish, in fact I can accomplish none of it...however all God intends to have accomplished can be accomplished through Christ who gives me strength! I struggle and then I recognize I am just a sinner saved by God's grace! I am on the team. I may not be the greatest! I may not be first but I am part of the Kingdom...and so are you! All of us have sinned and all have fallen short of the Glory of God! (Rom. 3) God so loved the world that He gave his only son so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life! (John 3)

The second reason I struggle with this issue of divorce is that it continues to perpetuate an image of "less than," for women. The idea that men can issue a decree with no notice implies that the woman is property. This was in fact the issue in Biblical times. Women were regarded as "Less than." Jesus' statement fulfills the law by telling all people that they are equal. No longer should we treat others as if they are less than us. No longer should we allow others to treat others as "less than." Jesus asks us today, "Are you ready for more?"

I struggle and then I remember that Jesus wants to know if we are ready for more! He asks today, "*You have heard, but I say!*" *Are you ready for more?* Are you ready to look past the law and the strict letter of the law that defines the Pharisees and scribes? Are you willing to step beyond the interpretation given by the world and look to the possibilities given by God? Will you continue to be bound by rigid and immovable regulations or will you recognize that God wants more for you? You have heard the Law! But I say the law is more. The law is given for us as an opportunity to Love God and one another.



It is given as an opportunity for us to show grace and reach out to those who have different opinions from ours.

The Law is our opportunity for our yes to be yes and our no to be no! It is our opportunity to remember our relationships with our brothers and our sisters and recognize our responsibility in keeping those relationships real! You have heard...But I say that there is more to life! Life comes as one plants and another waters but ultimately it comes from God who gives the growth. Are you ready to grow? Are you ready for more? You have heard...But I say Amen!