



Sermon on the Mount: Murder, Adultery, and Divorce

Script References

God's Wisdom for Righteousness

0:00-0:52

Jon: Imagine a world where everyone treats each other with dignity and respect. And when problems do arise, everyone works hard to do right by each other.

Tim: In the Bible, this way of treating each other is called doing righteousness.

Jon: And it sounds great, but how are we supposed to know how to always do right by others?

Tim: Well, Jesus, like any Israelite teacher, believed that you can learn righteousness through studying God's wisdom that's found in the ancient Scriptures, the Torah and the Prophets.

Jon: So studying things like the laws that God gave ancient Israel.

Tim: Exactly. Jesus believed that God's wisdom can be found within those laws if we meditate on them.

Jon: Ancient laws can teach us how to do right by each other today?

Tim: Yes. And let's watch how Jesus does it here in the Sermon on the Mount. So Jesus will first quote a command from the Torah, and then, second, he'll reveal God's wisdom underneath the command.

Jon: Okay. Let's jump in.

Murder and Anger

0:52-2:20

Tim: Alright. He starts with the pretty intense topic, murder.

Jon: Jesus begins, "You have heard that it was said to the ancients, you shall not commit murder."¹

1. Matthew 5:21

Tim: He's quoting from the Ten Commandments here.²

2. Exodus 20:13

Jon: "And I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be guilty in the court. And whoever says to his brother, 'You good for nothing,' will be guilty in the high court."³ Wait. So Jesus is equating anger and name-calling with murder?

3. Matthew 5:22

Tim: He got your attention, didn't he?

Jon: Yeah, but obviously murdering someone is worse than just getting mad and calling someone a name.

Tim: Sure, but that's not his point. Jesus is provocatively showing how murder, anger, and verbal abuse, they're all surface manifestations of something that is way deeper.

Jon: Which is?

Tim: How much you value—or don't value—someone's existence.

Jon: I see—like murder is the ultimate way of saying that someone's life doesn't matter.

Tim: And so is losing your temper or belittling someone. These all reveal an attitude of superiority and contempt for the life of another person. It wreaks havoc in our relationships and communities, and it's worthy of serious consequences.

Jon: So the wisdom of this command is about way more than just murder. For Jesus, this command is about treating everyone as valuable.

Tim: Right. Jesus wants us to see that any time we demean or devalue other people, it's a failure to do right by them. His definition of righteousness means treating everybody as a fellow image of God.⁴

4. Genesis 1:26-28;
Matthew 25:35-40;
1 John 3:16-18

Adultery and Lust

2:20-3:37

Jon: Okay. The next case study is about adultery. "You have heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery."⁵

5. Matthew 5:27

Tim: Again, quoting from the Ten Commandments here.⁶

6. Exodus 20:14

Jon: "And I say to you that everyone who keeps on staring at a woman in order to stir up sexual desire, he's already committed adultery with her in his heart."⁷ Okay. So Jesus isn't talking about merely finding someone attractive.

7. Matthew 5:28

Tim: No. He's talking about the long, creepy stare, objectifying someone, looking at them like they exist for your own pleasure. And when we do this, we are stripping a fellow human of their God-given dignity, even if we keep our hands to ourselves.

Jon: In fact, this is so serious to Jesus he goes on to say, "If your eye or hand is causing you to sin, cut them off."⁸ I mean, really?

8. Matthew 5:29-30

Tim: Jesus was the master of hyperbole. I mean, he just said the real problem is in our hearts, not our eyes or our hands. But he's trying to make clear that the stakes are really high.

Jon: Yeah, well, he succeeded.

Tim: It's important to remember that Jesus was raised on the Hebrew Scriptures, which portray sex as a beautiful thing.⁹ But if sexual desire is driving us to dishonor the image of God in others or in ourselves, if it's causing breakdown in our relationships, it's actually ruining us. And we need to do whatever it takes to deal with it.

9. Genesis 2:19-25;
Song of Songs

Divorce and Remarriage

3:37-6:21

Jon: Well, this doesn't get any easier because the third case study is on divorce. Jesus says, "It has also been said, whoever sends away his wife, he must give her a certificate of divorce."¹⁰ What's going on here? Sending away his wife?

10. Matthew 5:31

Tim: Yeah. In Jesus' day, only Israelite men could initiate a divorce. And that imbalance led to all kinds of problems.

Jon: But divorce was allowed.

Tim: It was, though only one law in the entire Torah addressed the issue, and Jesus just quoted from it. The law said that if a man initiates a divorce, he has to do it in the proper way and for a legitimate reason.¹¹

11. Deuteronomy 24:1-4

Jon: Okay, so what's a legitimate reason?

Tim: Well, this was actually a hot debate in Jesus' day. According to some Torah scholars, this law allowed for divorce only in the case of adultery. But other Torah scholars argued that the law allowed a man to divorce his wife for any reason, even dissatisfaction with the marriage.

Jon: Okay, so here Jesus enters into that very specific debate.

Tim: Right. Now, if a man could threaten divorce for any reason, that would make it easier for him to abuse his wife. And so to protect women, Jesus sided with those who limited legitimate divorce to cases of adultery. And he makes this clear when he says:

Jon: "And I say to you, any man who sends away his wife, except for a case of sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery."¹² Okay, and what does that mean, "makes her the victim of adultery"?

12. Matthew 5:32

Tim: Yeah. Jesus is being provocative again, saying that if a man divorces his wife for an illegitimate reason—because he's tired of the marriage or just wants to be with somebody else—his marriage covenant is actually still intact.

Jon: Ah, and that means that any new marriage is an act of adultery.

Tim: Right. But notice Jesus explicitly assigns blame to the men in his culture because it's their selfish choices that are forcing women into these vulnerable situations.

Jon: And you can see how this could play out in a society where only men can initiate divorce for any reason. This could normalize the oppression of women on a large scale.

Tim: Totally. In his cultural context, Jesus' statement protects and elevates the dignity of women as images of God.

Jon: But what about other ways a marriage covenant can be violated, like neglect or abuse? Would those be legitimate reasons for divorce?

Tim: Yeah. Those are really important questions that Jesus doesn't address. His focus here is on how this one debated divorce law in the Torah was being twisted and misused by the men of his day.

Jon: How they were treating women like objects that could be discarded, like it's no big deal.

Tim: But for Jesus, the marriage covenant is designed to create interdependence and mutual respect so that the two can reflect God's image together as one.

God's Wisdom for How We Treat People

6:21-7:06

Tim: And that leads us back to the main point of all three case studies. Jesus is showing how God's wisdom in these commands, it's aimed at our core desires and motivations that affect how we treat people.

Jon: Someone could strictly follow these rules about murder, adultery, and divorce but still dishonor and objectify people in other ways.

Tim: Right. For Jesus, real righteousness and wisdom means treating every human like they have ultimate value.

Jon: Yeah. If we valued others that much, imagine what kind of world we could create.

Tim: And that's exactly what Jesus had in mind. His announcement about the arrival of God's heavenly Kingdom here on Earth, it was meant to reshape our imaginations. God's wisdom invites us to honor the image of God in every person that we meet.

Credits

Jon: We just looked at three case studies that illustrate Jesus' vision of doing right by others and fostering healthy relationships.

Tim: Next, we'll look at three more about keeping your word, responding to injustice, and how to treat people that you can't stand.¹³

13. Matthew 5:33-48