

Matthew 5:21-26

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 June 2014

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 0 0] Next Sunday evening, we will be celebrating the Lord's Supper, and the exhortation found in Paul's letter to the Corinthians that we read a few moments ago that a man ought to examine himself as part of that participation is relevant to every time of communion. We know that in our tradition we sometimes distinguish informally between big communions and little communions.

Probably not the best way of making the distinction, but those of you who are part of the congregation will know what I'm referring to. And maybe we have this idea, or if not the idea in actual practice, that we recognize, yes, in a big communion, well, we have preparatory services, and we're encouraged more obviously to prepare, to examine ourselves. But when we have a wee communion, I wonder how many have had the experience of appearing in church, and you hadn't realized there was going to be a communion at that service. I'm not giving you a hard time for that. I'm just asking if that's something that's ever happened to you. I imagine that it has to some. So given that in a week's time we will be gathering around the Lord's table, I thought it would be helpful for us to just spend a little time preparing for that. And the way that we're going to do so is with the help of Jesus' teaching concerning the place and priority of reconciliation in the life of the believer. And turn with me, if you will, to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5. And we're going to be reading from verse 21. In Matthew chapter 5, verse 21, we'll read through to the end of that little section, verse 26. And this is the passage that we're going to be giving some thought to this evening. It's on page 969 in the church Bible. Matthew chapter 5, and we'll read from verse 21. You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, do not murder. And anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother Raka is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says you fool will be in danger of the fire of hell. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother, then come.

[2 : 4 3] And offer your gift. 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. The Word of God. Now, how can a passage entitled, certainly in the Bible version or the church version of the Bible, how can a passage entitled, Murder, prepare us for participating in the Lord's Supper? It doesn't seem very promising in that regard. Well, let's just read again one of the verses that we read where I think we can draw out a helpful challenge in this matter.

In verse 23, listen to what Jesus says. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother. Then come and offer your gift. The call that Jesus makes in this verse can be applied to the matter of self-examination before participating, or maybe more accurately, as part of our participation in the Lord's Supper. Now, these verses, of course, apply more broadly to all worship or service.

Directed to God. But they can and do include the matter of gathering at His table. I remember, and I may have mentioned this before, I can't remember, but I remember in Moyobamba, one of the ministers took these words of Jesus at face value, and it was His custom before the elements were distributed, the bread and the wine. He would give opportunity for those in the congregation to approach somebody who they had some issue with, where there was need for reconciliation, to ask forgiveness, to be forgiven.

And there would be a time given for that. I suppose there's no time like the present. I'm not convinced that that's the best way of doing things, but he was drawing from this exhortation. And

certainly it's true that it's an important thing to do. The manner in which we do it, well, we're going to think about that in a moment.

[5 : 21] Now, the verses that we've read, just to give ourselves a little bit of context before we spend some time thinking about them more carefully, the verses that we've read form part of the Sermon on the Mount. And in this sermon, Jesus lays out the values of His kingdom and what He demands of and commends in His disciples. In the previous verses there in the section entitled, The Fulfillment of the Law, Jesus has spoken of a greater righteousness, a righteousness that surpasses the righteousness of the religious leaders of the day. And then in verse 21, or beginning in verse 21, He gives a number of examples of the surpassing righteousness that He is talking about.

And Jesus does so by reference to God's law delivered through Moses, and particularly the Ten Commandments. The section that we're looking at concerns the Sixth Commandment, do not murder. So Jesus takes the law that was familiar to His hearers and uses that as His starting point for teaching on this greater or surpassing righteousness.

Now, having established, as He's done in the previous verses, that His intention is not to abolish the law, He goes on to present a deeper and more radical way of understanding and applying the law. And this centers on identifying the core principles that lie behind the prohibitions or requirements of the law.

Now, in the case of the section that we've read, do not murder, that commandment, the underlying principle is that as disciples we are not to be angry or hateful or hurtful in how we relate one to another.

[7 : 25] And this is something that Jesus draws out, or a manner in which Jesus applies this particular commandment. Well, let's consider what is said by Jesus in these verses under the following headings.

We're going to think, first of all, of the rhetoric of the rabbi. Jesus is acting here or teaching here as a rabbi, as a teacher.

And we want to think about the language He uses, and in particular, expressions that He uses that will help us identify who He is. So that's the first thing we want to think about, the rhetoric of the rabbi.

But then we want to think about the reality of the problem. Jesus identifies a very real problem that He wants to deal with, and we want to notice what that problem is. But what Jesus also does is present to us the response that is required of us, as we would, I hope, concur with Him that there is a problem that needs to be dealt with.

And then also we have in these verses outlined for us the results of inaction. If we don't respond as we ought, if we just ignore what we are told by Jesus, what will be the outcome?

[8 : 41] What will be the results of that? So that's the way in which we want to think about these verses this evening. First of all, then, the rhetoric of the rabbi. A better heading, really, for this would have been the identity of the rabbi.

But I did want an R to get all my headings alliterative, so I went for the rhetoric of the rabbi. But in fairness, it is the rhetoric of Jesus that points in the direction of His identity.

Now, let me just explain what I mean by that, because it's not immediately obvious at all. Really, the question that we're asking is, who is this rabbi preaching on the mountainside?

Why should you pay attention to what He has to say? And it's all about authority. The attention that we give to somebody who's telling us what to do will be determined by the authority that that person has.

And if we recognize His authority. And in this case, this rabbi teaching a long time ago, what authority does He have to tell us what we should do?

[9 : 53] Now, the clue to His identity and contingent authority, because His authority, as we'll see in a moment, is wholly related to who He is. The clue to this is to be found in contrasting the language used by Jesus in introducing what the religious leaders taught and what He taught.

Now, He does this on several occasions through the sermon, but our concern really is just the section that we've read. Notice how Jesus introduces these two, I wouldn't say in any way contradictory, but certainly contrasting teaching.

Teaching. And how they're introduced. So, in the case of the rabbis or the religious leaders of the day, how does Jesus introduce what they would say?

Well, we have it there in verse 21. You have heard that it was said to people long ago, do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. Now, this expression, you have heard that it was said.

And something similar or similar language is repeated throughout the sermon. For example, in verse 27, you have heard that it was said. In verse 31, it has been said.

[11:04] In verse 33, again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago. And we could go on. This is the way in which the rabbis would introduce their teaching. This is what we might call a rabbinic formula that they would use to introduce the teaching that they would bring.

Whether it be directly from the Torah, do not murder, straight from the Bible. You can't quibble with it as good, solid teaching. But they would introduce it with these words.

Or perhaps if they were giving their own interpretation of a particular commandment or passage in the law or the prophets, this is the way they would introduce what they had to say.

You have heard that it was said or it has been said. That was the way that they generally taught. In doing so, there was a sense in which they would establish a certain distance, we might say, between themselves and what was being taught.

It afforded, I suppose, a measure of anonymity. It's not me that's saying this, but this is what has been said. This is what was said long ago. And that is how they would introduce what they had to say.

[12:19] I have to say, at one level, we're not criticizing them for doing it in this manner. At one level, if we want to be as generous, and it's always good to be generous, it reflected a commendable humility.

They were making no claim to personal authority to teach or command, rather directing their hearers to the authority of the ages, what had been taught long ago and, indeed, in many cases, what was found in the Scriptures.

So, that is how they would introduce their teaching. And Jesus, in a sense, parrots them at the beginning of these different sections. But then notice how Jesus introduces what He has to say. There in that same section, we notice in verse 22, you've heard that it was said. There's nothing wrong with what is then related.

But then in verse 22, He says, But I tell you, but I tell you. And the I there has a real place of emphasis in the text, and, indeed, as Jesus would have spoken to those who were listening.

[13:30] And we read that, and it doesn't maybe create a particularly strong impression on us, but it would be difficult to overstate how powerful the language being employed by Jesus is. Some who were listening might have thought that it bordered on the blasphemous.

It bordered on being blasphemously presumptuous that Jesus would say, Well, you've heard that it was said long ago, but I say to you. You see, Jesus has just quoted, in the case of the section we have here, He's just quoted from the Ten Commandments, the book of the covenant, the tablets engraved by the very finger of God.

And yet, while still affirming the enduring place of the written law, He now claims to offer a deeper and a more radical teaching or interpretation of the subject, or in this case, this particular commandment.

But I say to you, the words of Jesus constitute a definitive declaration of the will of God.

And so Jesus, in so speaking, is implicitly assuming His own divine identity and authority. And this is very important.

[14:50] We're beginning to see, well, who is this rabbi who dares to say such things, who dares to claim such a place as to be able to definitively and authoritatively interpret and apply the law.

That Matthew, in compiling his gospel, was so careful to record the manner in which Jesus spoke, also points to one of Matthew's key purposes in writing the gospel, namely to present Jesus as the divine Messiah.

And Matthew does that in a number of ways. But in this passage, where we might not immediately see that there are pointers to the identity of Jesus in contrasting how the teaching is presented by the rabbis and by Jesus, but I say to you, we do have a very real and clear pointer as to who Jesus is.

There's no doubt that the crowds were impressed. They were conscious that there was something very different about the manner in which Jesus taught. Indeed, at the close of the sermon, as we

just need to turn a couple of pages to the end of chapter 7, we were given a little summary of how people responded to Jesus and what He said.

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at His teaching because He taught as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law.

[16:21] So there is this big contrast between the teachers of the law and Jesus. And Jesus, in the manner that He introduces what He has to say, is giving a clue as to who He is.

That's the first thing I wanted us to notice. It's important to notice it. I think it's also important as, I hope, impressing upon us how important it is to listen to what He says, given who He is.

But let's move on to what we're calling the reality of the problem that Jesus identifies in these verses. Now, we've already commented on how it might appear in Congress to be considering the commandment, do not murder, in the context of preparation for the Lord's Supper.

We might instinctively respond, well, it's not an issue. Murder is really not an issue for me. I may have many faults. There may be many things I do that I ought not to do, many things that I leave undone that I ought to do.

But, hey, murder, I'm not that bad. That's not an issue. It's not a problem. Plenty of problems there might be, but this is not a problem. That would be perhaps an instinctive reaction that we might have.

[17:38] But what Jesus is doing is putting His finger on a real problem. He's identifying that the reality of a big problem for Christians, for disciples of Jesus, that of anger and resentment and hateful attitudes among Christians, and indeed, in a broader way, that we might harbor towards others.

And, of course, that reminds us of a truth concerning who we are and where we are as believers. We are not yet what we will become. We are being transformed into the likeness of Jesus, but the completion date is still sometime in the future.

We are forgiven sinners, but we remain sinners. And we sin in this matter of harboring anger in our hearts and in speaking words that hurt and demean others.

This is an issue for us. This is a real problem for us. In what ways, in these verses, does Jesus indicate that we can break the sixth commandment?

What are the different ways of doing so? Well, what does Jesus say? He identifies a few. The first one is the obvious one that He mentions there in introducing what He has to say.

[19:04] You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. That's true. It's from the Ten Commandments, and one way of breaking the commandment is indeed by murder, by taking somebody's life.

That's one way in which we can break the commandment. But Jesus goes on to identify other ways in which we can be guilty of breaking the commandment. He speaks of being angry with our brother.

In verse 22, But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. I think the word brother there is probably to be understood and would have been understood by his hearers as simply a reference to a fellow Jew transporting the passage to our own time.

I think we can take that very broadly as anyone who is angry with anybody. It would be a particular problem within the fellowship of believers, but I don't think it's restricted to that.

We could be guilty of being angry with others also. And Jesus says that is another way in which we can break this commandment, being angry with another.

[20:23] But then also, and all these things of course are tied together by insulting or by abusing others. I don't think there's any great difference in the meaning between Raka there in verse 22.

Anyone who says to his brother Raka is answerable to the Sanhedrin, but anyone who says you fool will be in danger of the fire of hell. Sometimes a lot of ink is spilt in trying to establish some difference between the meaning of these two words.

And perhaps there is some significant difference. But it seems to me that the difference is simply that for whatever reason, this particular word Raka was deemed sanctionable. So within the context of first century Palestine, if you insulted somebody with that word, well, you could be hauled up before the local council and you could be wrapped in your knuckles or whatever the sanction was.

But if you used another word, well, you could get away with it. There was almost a playing with words. Well, I won't say Raka because that will be a problem, but I can always call him a fool and it's not a problem.

So I don't think really that there's a huge difference between the meaning of the words, but how they were understood and used. It's also suggested, though we really don't know a great deal about this word Raka, but it suggested that it carried the idea of superiority towards those deemed inferior. [21 : 48] So as well as being hurtful and aggressive and maybe the product of anger in somebody's heart, it also evidenced a pride in the one who would use that word as he looked down on others who he thought to be inferior to himself.

So when we think about these different ways that Jesus identifies that we can break this commandment, I think if we're honest, we would conclude that, yes, there is a problem. I don't think it was Jesus who said, Houston, we have a problem, but tonight he is saying, Aberdeen, we have a problem. Bon Accord, we have a problem. Here's a problem. This is a real problem that I identify.

That, yes, you're disciples of mine. Yes, you're believers, but this is something that you need to recognize and deal with. There's anger in your heart. There are attitudes towards others that are hurtful.

There is language that you use that is offensive or causes offense and demeans others. And this is something that needs to be dealt with. So Jesus identifies the reality of the problem, but of course he also, as you would expect, gives instruction concerning the response required.

[23 : 09] Jesus identifies the response that is right and proper to anger and the resulting broken relationships. And he does so by picturing a familiar scene for his hearers, one that they could have very easily pictured in their mind.

We have that in verses 23 and 24. And the picture painted by Jesus is of a worshiper heading to the temple in Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice.

The language that is used here of offering and indeed the word gift that is used here, it doesn't necessarily lead us to conclude that he is contemplating or has in mind a sacrifice, but I think that's a reasonable conclusion to come to, that this is the picture being painted of a worshiper going to the temple to offer a sacrifice.

Now his hearers would have been able to picture that very easily. But just as the worshiper is about to offer the sacrifice, he remembers that somebody has something against him.

And so this worshiper, what does he have to do? Well, we're told he has to leave his gift or sacrifice, if indeed that's what's being referred to, as I'm suggesting it is, and he has to leave it there by the altar and he has to look for the offended party to seek and to secure reconciliation with him or her.

[24 : 42] Now this example that Jesus gives or this picture that Jesus paints, I think only serves to confirm how relevant this is to the matter of preparing to gather around the Lord's table.

Because that very sacrament is a sacrament that points to the sacrifice of Jesus that fulfilled all the temple sacrifices. How much more is it important for us to participate in that remembrance of that once and for all sacrifice with our hearts cleansed from anger and resentment and hurtful attitudes towards others and with relationships that have not been restored?

Well, the picture that Jesus paints is vivid, but what does it tell us about the response required? Well, let me suggest that it tells us three things. It tells us what we need to do.

It tells us how we need to do it. And it tells us also why we need to do it. This picture painted in verses 23 and 24.

First of all, it tells us what we need to do. Well, what do we need to do? Well, we need to be reconciled. Leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother.

[26 : 04] This involves willingness on both sides. One has to take the initiative. Certainly the picture that's painted or the example that's given involves one taking the initiative.

The implication seems to be the one who is guilty of having offended or hurt the other. They have to take the initiative. But for it to have a satisfactory outcome, well, there would need to be willingness on both sides.

It's just a picture, so we don't get all the details of what would have happened or what transpired. But it's certainly more than just saying sorry, though it may well involve saying sorry.

It is this determined concern and initiative that has been taken to secure reconciliation with the one who we have an issue with or who has an issue with us.

That's what we need to do. But the picture painted also tells us how we need to do it. I think three words sum up how we are to do this. And the three words are urgency, initiative, and encounter.

[27 : 13] Let me just think of these three words and why I draw out these words. Well, the picture itself conveys very powerfully the matter of urgency.

This idea of somebody who's going to the temple, they've got their sacrifice, and they're just about to offer it. And Jesus says, you know, even though that's a really important thing that they're going to do, it's more important, it's more urgent that that worshiper leave their gift, leave the sacrifice, and sort things out with their brother.

That is a greater and more urgent matter to be attended to. And so even though the picture is somewhat foreign to us, an altar and sacrifices and what have you, we can certainly draw out this truth that it is an urgent matter to seek reconciliation where reconciliation is needed.

So urgency. But there's also the question of initiative. Now, I just commented on that a moment ago, but in the example given, the initiative rests with the one who has done the offending.

Although I should say that that doesn't exclude that the injured party could take the initiative. The fact that this particular example doesn't contemplate that, doesn't exclude it.

[28 : 29] There's nothing that would prevent either party in some dispute or in some breakdown of a relationship, either party to take the initiative. But you can understand that there would be a particular ethical onus on the one who was perhaps in greater fault in having created the breakdown, however that expresses itself.

The bottom line is that somebody has to take the initiative. Isn't that the problem so often when we have a breakdown in a relationship that there's pride on both sides and so nobody is willing to take the initiative?

If I can just give you a personal example which I usually try and avoid, but it's a long time ago when I was a foolish youth. Now I'm a foolish old man, but this is when I was a foolish youth or teenager. I remember I fell out with a friend.

I fell out with this friend. We were best friends. We went to camp together. He lived in Inverness. I lived in Dornach, but he would come up for weekends or I would go down to Inverness for the weekend and we were best of pals.

Now I can't even remember all the details, but the point is we fell out, probably over something very trivial, but unfortunately we fell out just as I was being picked up by my parents from Inverness to go back to Dornach.

[29 : 46] Now if we'd had even a few hours together, we'd have sorted it out, but just at that moment when we were kind of really annoyed with each other, I got picked up back to Dornach.

It was months before we spoke to each other again. Probably, in fact, I think it was over a year. Now why was that? Well because neither of us would take the initiative. Of course it was his fault. No, I'm just kidding. I can't even remember whose fault it was, but the point is neither of us would take the initiative and what this is explaining is somebody needs to take the initiative or else there won't be reconciliation.

How much pain is there in families, in marriages, in the relationship between parents and children because somebody's not willing to take the initiative to go to the person and to seek reconciliation. Now sometimes we'll be rebuffed. That's the reality. But that is not for us to predict, to prophesy. We have a responsibility to take the initiative.

[30 : 51] So there's urgency. That's one word that touches on how we are to do this. But then there's this initiative. But there's also the question of encounter.

We need to deal face to face with others. And again, isn't that the thing that often we're so reluctant to do? We don't want to deal face to face with somebody. It's uncomfortable.

It's awkward. It's humiliating. It's scary. What will they say? Will they accept my approach? Will they reject me? And so we are so reluctant to have that face to face encounter.

But here Jesus says that's what's necessary. You know, leave your gift at the altar. Just leave it there. There's something much more urgent. Go and find that person and speak to them and sort it out.

Be reconciled to them. This is the response that is required. Now, as I've just commented, Jesus doesn't guarantee that our initiative will be well received or result in the desired outcome.

[31 : 56] That the example, the hypothetical example, seems to assume that reconciliation does take place. But there's no guarantee that that will always be the case.

The point is that we need to do what we can do. Nothing more or nothing less is asked of us. So, this story or this picture that Jesus paints tells us what we need to do.

It tells us something about how we need to do it. But it also tells us why we need to do it. And the why is simply the priority of reconciliation. Notice the significance of a little word there in verse 24. First, go and be reconciled to your brother. And that first isn't just referring to the chronology of it. You know, the order of events. Well, first you're reconciled, then come to the altar.

It's certainly saying that. But I think it's saying more than that. It's saying that this is the priority. This is the first thing that you have to do. You know, of your to-do list. You've got all these things in your to-do list and being reconciled is right at the bottom and he's saying put it right up to the top.

[33 : 03] Before you do any of the other ones, get that right up to the top. You know, yes, we prefer to put it down to the bottom because we won't ever reach the bottom one. Whoever reaches the bottom to-do on a to-do list, that's just, it goes on to the next list.

And Jesus is saying, no, take it right up to the top. That's the one you need to do first. This should be a priority for you. So Jesus explains why this is something we must do.

Reconciliation, of course, and it ought not to surprise us that it's a priority because reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel. We, as believers, have been reconciled to God and we are to be reconciled with others.

We can't separate or compartmentalize the two, our relationship with God and our relationship with others. They're inextricably linked. Just to illustrate that a little bit, what would you make of a teacher who says, I love teaching, it's just the pupils I can't stand.

You know, I love teaching, but the pupils, oh, they're a nightmare. You can't divide it in that way.

Well, what about a Christian who says, I love God. It's just his people I can't abide.

[34 : 14] You say, well, that can't be. You can't do that. You can't separate these two things. They go together. Reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel. Reconciliation with God but then flowing from that reconciliation with others.

So what about you? What about gathering around the Lord's table a week today and next Sunday evening? Are there matters that you could very helpfully deal with that you need to deal with in this matter of anger in your heart, of offense given or offense taken, of reconciliation that needs to be secured?

Well, you have a whole week in which to give it the attention that it merits. But then finally let's also notice the results of inaction very briefly.

Just think for a moment of the picture that Jesus paints here. I wonder how common would it have been for a worshiper to do what this hypothetical worshiper did in the picture painted by Jesus?

You know, how often would that have happened at the temple? That a worshiper would have gone to the altar and he'd have said, oh, hang on, you know, I need to be reconciled with this guy so I'll just leave my sacrifice and I'll get somebody to look after it and I'll come back.

[35 : 37] I wonder how often that happened. I don't know. I wasn't there in Jerusalem when Jesus was teaching but I suspect that was a very rare occurrence. It's not the kind of thing that would have happened very often.

Even if we thought of, say, a hundred worshipers who, for whom it was needful to reconcile with another. Let's not assume that everybody had an issue they needed to deal with but let's just imagine a hundred worshipers in first century Palestine and they're going to Jerusalem to offer their sacrifice at the altar.

A hundred of them. How many of those hundred would have said, well, hang on a minute, I can't do this. I've got to go and find this guy and sort things out. I don't know. I really don't think there would have been very many.

You see, it's the right thing to do but how often do we actually do that which we ought to do? And what happens if we don't?

What are the results of inaction on our part? Well, let me just mention three things, three results that I think we find in this passage. The first thing is that worship is impossible. When I first was scribbling down this sermon, I had here worship is flawed and then as I was typing it out, I thought, well, that doesn't do it justice.

[36 : 51] It doesn't do it justice it's not just that our worship is flawed, it's impossible. It's simply not possible to worship God aright with anger festering in your heart. You can go through the motions, you can leave the gift at the altar, you can do that but it's not worship.

It looks like worship. Everybody looking on thinks it's worship but it's not worship. And this is a very solemn and tragic result of inaction on our part.

Worship is impossible. But then not only is worship impossible but life is miserable. There are temporal consequences of anger and broken relationships. Jesus mentions in these few verses the actions of the Sanhedrin, of one who is insulting or speaking, offending others.

He even mentions an example of something ending up in court and prison. An extreme example. For us, perhaps, the consequences are more likely to be felt in our emotional state, our mental health, our spiritual well-being.

There will be consequences of inaction in this matter. We'll find that valued friendships or healthy relationships are painfully lost or damaged and it's miserable.

[38 : 04] Life is miserable. But then thirdly and finally in terms of the results of inaction, the future is hellish. Well, not just hellish but hell itself awaits the unrepentant.

unrepentant. That's what Jesus says. It's very strong, the language that he uses in this passage. Anyone who says you fool will be in danger of the fire of hell.

And again, he makes reference to that danger just a little bit further down. And so the results of inaction are not trivial.

They're very serious. and for us to think about very carefully as we ponder on what we'll do in response to Jesus' teaching this evening. Let's draw things to a close.

In the light of all this, in the light of what we've seen, how should we respond? I think there's a two-fold response. First of all, very simply, do what Jesus says. Go and be reconciled.

[39 : 03] But there's something else that we must do. You see, as we appreciate the radical demands being made by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, in this part of the sermon and indeed throughout the sermon, if we really understand and get to grips with what Jesus is asking of us, we will realize how morally exposed we are.

We will become painfully conscious of how far short we have fallen and, if we're honest, how far short we will continue to fall in these matters.

Our hearts cry out, but even if I try, I'll never match up. I'll never be able to do all that Jesus is demanding of me. What to do in such circumstances?

Well, listen to something that Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, who was the minister at Westminster Chapel last century, says on this matter concerning the Sermon on the Mount.

Listen to what he says and I quote, No man can live the Sermon on the Mount in and of himself and unaided. And then he goes on, There is nothing that so leads us to the gospel and its grace as the Sermon on the Mount.

[40 : 17] What does he mean by that? What is he saying by that? Well, he's recognizing that the law, including Jesus' radical interpretation and application of it for his disciples, is our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ and his forgiveness, his righteousness and his enabling.

We recognize that we fall short. Yes, with his help we seek to correct that, to do what we're told to do, to be reconciled, but we also recognize that even when we attempt to and put our best efforts into it, we'll always still fall short in a measure.

And what to do then? Despair? No. To go to the one who has fulfilled perfectly this superior, surpassing righteousness, our Savior, Jesus Christ, and find in him the forgiveness that we need, the righteousness that we do not have of ourselves, and the enabling that will help us to live as he would have us live.

To appreciate that great need that we have of Christ, given how far short we fall, serves only to reinforce our need to come duly examined and repentant to feast on Christ at his table.

And so, let us come and let us eat and let us be satisfied as we gather conscious of the one who has provided that which we cannot provide for ourselves.

[41 : 45] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you for Jesus and his teaching and how it touches on many raw nerves. it touches on those things where we fall short.

We confess that we are those who fall out with others, who speak, sometimes perhaps without it being our intention, but we hurt others, we offend others, we get angry with others, and we allow that anger to fester in our hearts and in our lives.

Forgive us for that and help us to take seriously your word as it would commend to us and instruct us what we ought to do in these matters.

And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.