

"JESUS WANTS ME TO BE 'THAT' HOLY?!"

Matthew 5:21-24

Dear Friends, whom the Lord deeply loves,

Does the name **ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING** ring any bells? It didn't ring my bell until I researched a famous line which can be appropriately used this weekend. When I looked it up, she came up as the author of a series of 44 love poems written about 1845. On this Valentine's Day weekend, one of her lines say: **HOW DO I LOVE THEE? LET ME COUNT THE WAYS.**

When we take that lyric which works well for Valentine's day and apply it to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, we count all sorts of ways Jesus loves us. Here are a couple we have heard from the past 2 of our Savior's sermons:

We have listened to Jesus tell us how **blessed/fortunate** we are, what **champions** we are with lives that are **meek, merciful, pure in heart, persecuted, and hungry & thirsty after righteousness.**

We have listened to Jesus tell us to **reflect his light** by letting our lights shine before others – not for our praise, but **for the praise of our Father in heaven.**

When Moses brought God's 10 commandments to Israel at Mt. Sinai, he delivered the laws God gave them to show them what He expected out of them and to guide them to live as his holy, chosen, special people. To impress on them that God meant business, **Sinai was on fire.** There was lightning flashing, thunder booming, smoke billowing, and earth shaking. Imagine standing at the foot of Sinai and experiencing all this. You'd be shaking in your boots. You'd know you were standing in the presence of a HOLY God **hearing him tell you just how holy he expects you to be.**

Now change the scenery to another mountain. It's not flashing, it's not thundering, it's not smoking, it's not shaking. The grass is green, the birds are chirping, and the sun is shining. You're sitting at the feet of Jesus and hearing his gentle voice. As you listen to him, you realize again you are seated in the presence of a HOLY God **hearing him tell you just how holy he expects you to be.**

Does He really mean all this? Is He really talking to me or about someone else? We listen to the Savior's Sermon for the 3rd time and wonder:

"JESUS WANTS ME TO BE 'THAT' HOLY?!"

And the answer is **YES:**

1. HE DEMANDS PURE HEARTS LIKE HIS
2. HE FORGIVES SINFUL HEARTS LIKE MINE

1

This famous sermon is spoken to people who are already believers in Jesus. It is a lesson from Jesus to true disciples about what Luther calls "**the fruits and good works of a Christian.**" {Kretzmann, NT. Vol 1, p. 22} It is a sermon that's designed to guide us in Christian living so that we live lives pleasing to God.

But what strikes us is just how holy Jesus wants us to be. You know the verses: ...**therefore be holy, because I the Lord your God am holy,** God told the Israelites {Lev 19:2} A little bit later after our text, Jesus told the disciples: **Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.** {Matt 5:48} We hear the words, and we know that **God demands pure hearts like his.** We see how high Jesus sets the bar of holiness for us. He doesn't want just holy actions, but holy thoughts. He wants holy attitudes in our hearts. He wants complete purity in our relationships with our fellow members, our spouses and families, our co-workers, our classmates, our God.

Jesus says: **You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "do no 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, 'Raca' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.**

The Scribes & Pharisees had a ball with the 5th commandment because in their own minds, they were pure in heart. They limited 'murder' to the taking of life. So if they hadn't committed murder, they in fact were holy and righteous.

But Jesus goes way beyond their self-righteousness. He talks of anger as a vice grips that grabs everyone, including the Pharisees. And what Jesus says to them, He says to us. **Anger is a sin.** Speaking angry words is a sin. Thinking angry words is a sin. Jesus equates anger in the heart to that of murder and a violation of the 5th commandment. All too often the daily news underscores that truth!

Jesus uses two words “Raca” and “fool”, they are pretty similar, only one is in Aramaic and the other in Greek. They are both insulting words to express disrespect for someone. Today’s lingo might say words like “stupid” or “idiot”. So when I use those terms or think those terms, I am subject to God’s judgment. That makes me a ‘murderer’. You mean **Jesus wants me to be ‘that’ holy**....YES. **He demands pure hearts like His.**

We have a problem with this because we’re looking at the worldly view of being holy. If we just stay out of trouble with the law, if we just keep Everest Metro from pulling us over, if we just pay our taxes and our bills, that should satisfy God like it satisfies others. Jesus isn’t talking of civil obedience – He’s talking perfect, holy obedience to His will. Sincere obedience to God **demands pure hearts like his.**

Jesus continues: **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.** Now check your hearts. How pure are they? How ‘bout your temper snapping when you didn’t get your way? How ‘bout that run-in you had with your co-worker, fellow school parent, spouse, pastor, teacher, or St. Peter member? How ‘bout those “chips” you’ve been carrying on your shoulders for years? How ‘bout that *‘I’ll never speak to you again’* venom flowing through your arteries? How ‘bout those nasty thoughts that raise your blood-pressure at the mention of a name?

Do our hearts worship or fume in the pew? Do we pray to the Lord angry? Is this what we bring to God’s house or to His altar with our gifts or to His Communion table? A heart of bitterness & anger? I’ve seen anger on the faces of members standing in the narthex before walking into worship. How can you worship with joy and praise? How can you give glory to God with a mindset like that? And I’m sorry to say members have seen anger on my face too. How can I preside at worship, preach in this pulpit, or distribute communion with such an impure heart?

Jesus says, **“Stop”**. If those are our attitudes, if that’s where our hearts are, then it may be better to not commune first. But rather to go to with whomever you have issues and attempt reconciliation. Because unrepented sin is a barrier to God-pleasing worship. Does He want praise from our mouths that say the right things, but with heart that burning with anger or hatred? Hateful attitudes in God’s house steal the very message God wants us to hear. James says it this way: **19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.** {James 1:19-20} Does **Jesus want you & me to be ‘that’ holy?** Yes, that’s why **he demands pure hearts like His.**

2

Ushers, lock the doors and don’t let anyone out! Jesus has put us on our knees with his demands. But I can’t bear the thought of anyone leaving without Jesus lifting YOU up off your knees by hearing how **HE FORGIVES SINFUL HEARTS LIKE YOURS AND LIKE MINE!**

That’s the solution to our dilemma. Peter once turned to Jesus and asked, **“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”** {Jn 6:68} You see, Jesus knew we could never be holy like Him. So He became our holiness before God. He stepped into our shoes of sin, yet never once sinning. What God demanded of us, Jesus provided for us. **God demanded a pure heart** and He got it in Jesus. **God demanded absolute holiness** in thought, word, action, and attitude and He got it in Jesus. **God demanded payment** for everyone’s anger, bitterness, rage revenge, resentment, chips, grudges, hatred...and He got it in Jesus.

Jesus took our sins upon himself and suffered God’s judgment for them all. He experienced the fires of hell and damnation for us as He gave his blood on the cross. And before He died, Jesus declared the penalty paid and forgiveness earned. So when Jesus rose three days later, we have the assurance that God accepted Jesus’ work of redemption for us. **He put his stamp of approval** on everything he did.

Jesus forgives sinful hearts like yours & mine! God now declares: **YOU AND I ARE ‘THAT’ HOLY!** In our baptisms, we are clothed with Christ’s righteousness so completely it’s as if we had led an absolutely pure life. God does this free of charge, out of His great love. He takes Jesus’ holiness and applies it to us and it costs us nothing!

Now these thoughts fill our hearts: **Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.** {Ps 51:10} **Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience.** {Heb 10:22} **Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.** {Matt 5:8} **Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.** {Eph 5:1-2}

They say **“love is in the air”** this weekend! I suppose. But after hearing another part of the Savior’s sermon today, I pray you say **“love is in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”**, the **best valentine** you could ever have! *[Oh by the way, ushers, you can unlock the doors now.]* **AMEN**