

What Matters to the Master – Life
From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”
By Phil Brainerd
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Introduction

Years ago, say, the 1800s, if you walked through an average town in America, you would find stores - Stores that sold all kinds of merchandise. You could have a hardware store (seen here).

You could have a clothing store. In fact, you would likely have a ladies clothing store and a men’s clothing store. You would have a shoe shop. The list goes on.

In some cases, you had a “general store”- A store where you could find different kinds of things in one place.



Then, one day, an enterprising businessperson invented a kind of store that combined all the above and more. It was called a “department store”. One of the first large ones was Sears. When this kind of store was invented, shoppers could visit one store and find hardware, clothes, toys, and lot of other things all under one roof.

There’s a story about a town that was about to receive its first department store. Some young kids were wandering along the night before the store was scheduled to open. It was a bit late. They probably should have been home, but these kids were something less than model young people.

They looked at the front of the store. It was something they had never seen before. Then, they wandered around the back. As they turned the corner, they saw off in the distance a back door open. A janitor walked out, with a can of garbage. The janitor threw the garbage into a dumpster and then walked away. It was obvious that he was going home. At this point, something odd happened – the janitor left the door open. Maybe he had a long day?

Being that these weren’t the best models of upright behavior, these kids decided to go in and check out the new store. Once they got in, they saw one security guard sitting in his office talking on the phone with his girlfriend. One said, “You know, we could walk out of here with

anything we wanted.” Now, although these weren’t the best-behaved young people, but they weren’t the worst, either. They weren’t criminals. But having said that, they weren’t above a little mischief. ***They decided that it might be fun to switch a few price tags.***

They started in the hardware department. To tell the story, we’ll use today’s dollars. A \$500 table saw got the price tag from a \$10 hammer, and vice versa. A \$100 specialty drill got the price tag from a 50-cent box of nails. This happened all over the department.

The kids then moved on to the sporting goods. A \$400 family sized tent got the price tag from a \$10 box of golf balls. A \$1200 hunting rifle got the price tag from \$10 baseball cap.

The clothing department came next. In the center of the department was a beautiful mink coat. The price tag - \$5,000. That price tag was traded with the tag on a 25-cent replacement button.

When the doors of the store opened the next day, a flood of customers were met with a store full of the craziest prices anyone had ever seen. Things ranging from a 50-cent mink coat to a \$5,000 plastic button. I think the security guard wound up looking for a new job.

We’re in our series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells us about the King of the Universe.” We’re working our way through the Gospel of Matthew. In this session, we’re in a sub-series that we’re calling, “What Matters to the Master.” We can summarize this series with a simple statement:

For the Master to be your Master, what matters to the Master must matter to you.

When you talk about what matters, you’re talking about values. One way to think about values is to ask – “What are you willing to spend money on?” Our opening story today talked about values. Some things in a department store are valuable. They’re worth a lot, so they have a high price tag. Other things that aren’t worth as much have a small price tag.

We’re going to learn today that our world is like the department store in our story. In the story, somebody snuck in and changed all the price tags. Our world has the same problem. Our Creator made the world. He filled it with things that are valuable to him - Things that matter to him. If they didn’t matter, he wouldn’t have bothered making them. Although everything matters on some level, some things matter more. Some of those things matter a lot.

Sadly, it’s as though someone snuck into our world and changed all the price tags. Things that matter greatly to the Creator don’t matter much to the average resident of planet earth. Things that don’t matter much to the Creator are regarded as highly valuable by many of the world’s residents.

Today, we’re going to learn about something that is very valuable to God. It matters a great deal. Sadly, it’s not regarded as highly by many people. What is it? We’re going to learn today that Human life matters to the Master.

Let's read in Matthew Chapter 5

21 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. 23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. 25 "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, 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. 26 Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. (Matthew 5:21-26)

What does all this mean? Let's take it apart. We'll start with the first thought.

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder..."
(v 21)

Why does Jesus want to discuss murder? Let's review what came before this. In our last session, we said that God's Word matters to the Master. When Jesus discussed this, he told us there was a problem. He referred to the collection of writings called the Law and the Prophets. Today we know these are the "Old Testament". Jesus told us that this whole body of writing was important. However, some wanted to diminish parts.

Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven,
(Matthew 5:19)

Although Jesus didn't say specifically who, we got a strong hint in the passage we studied:

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (v 20)

We learned in our last session that the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law had some problems. Even though they were religious leaders, they weren't righteous enough to get into heaven. They were excluding and diminishing parts of the Law and the Prophets. Another way of saying this is that the religious leaders were getting things wrong.

Jesus is now going to do two things. First, he's going to continue telling us about the things that are important to him. He's telling us what matters to the Master. Second, he's going to start describing the ways that the religious leaders were getting these things wrong and his followers can get them right.

Let's look at that first part: What Matters to the Master. After telling us that god's Word matters, Jesus talks about murder. Let's go deeper and ask: Why is murder a bad thing? Because human life matters to the Master. Murder destroys life. It also destroys what God intends for human life.

Why do we believe that Human life is important to God? I've spoken about this at length in the past, so let's summarize. (If you'd like to learn more, go to my message, "Life Answers In Genesis: You Are Special")

Once again, we go back to the beginning: Genesis 1. The Genesis story outlines the process by which God created the heavens and the earth. Let's look at a few steps along the way.

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, (Genesis 1:3)

God starts by creating light. He declares that the light is "good."

Then God creates the land and the sea.

God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good. (v 10)

Light – good. Land and sea – good.

Now it's time for some landscaping.

The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. (v 12)

Light – good. Land and sea – good. Plants – good. This goes on for a while. God creates aquatic creatures in the water and then birds and animals. All of this he calls "good".

Finally, God makes human life. Human life completes what God has made. Here's what God then said:

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. (v 31)

Everything else – good. Add human life – very good. According to the Bible, human life is the pinnacle of the creation.

More than that, humans have a quality that makes them distinct: Humans are created in God's image.

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them; (Genesis 1:27)

Of all created things, only humans are made in God's image. This speaks to our purpose. This is what God intends for us. We don't just exist. We're not like rocks and plants and mountains and oceans. **We are like God.** From the moment of conception, humans hold a special status. And we're not just like God at the start. We are intended to become more like him in every moment of our existence.

We are very, very special. There is nothing else in the whole creation that is like humans. We could argue that the world was created first and foremost for the benefit of human beings. That's why Human life matters to the master.

However, there is a problem. Note: I'm going to have to summarize centuries of history in a few paragraphs. Humans have an enemy. He is the Devil or Satan. He is a fallen angel who heads armies of other fallen angels. He hates God, so he hates the thing that God loves the most. Here's what Jesus said about him in another place:

He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44)

The Devil hates humans. He wants us all dead. A big part of his work is lies. Among the things he's done over the ages, we could say that he is the one who came to our world and switched all the price tags. Whereas God values us highly, the devil thinks we're worthless. Sadly, a lot of humans have been fooled into accepting this.

What does that look like practically? It takes a lot of forms, but one is **anger**. We saw the first example of this in the story of Cain and Abel. This is another story that we've visited in the past, so again, we'll just summarize. Cain and Abel are the second generation of humans on the earth. They're the sons of Adam and Eve. We told in Genesis 4 that it came time to present sacrifices before the Lord. Here's how it went:

The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. (Genesis 4:4-5)

God tries to encourage Cain:

6 Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.” (Genesis 4:6-7)

Many of you know the story. Cain was angry. He allowed his anger to become an entry way for sin. Sin took the form of violence, and Cain murdered his innocent brother.

So, we have a terrible problem. The problem is anger. Anger, when not controlled, leads to sin. This can lead to violence. Another way to say it: Sin makes us devalue human life. Sin clouds our eyes so that we don't see the value that God places on humans.

This problem got worse through the generations of humans that followed Adam and Eve. Eventually, God had to make provision for this. After the flood, God said these words to Noah:

“Whoever sheds human blood,
by humans shall their blood be shed;
for in the image of God
has God made mankind.
(Genesis 9:6)

Later, this became part of the Ten Commandments: “You shall not murder.” (Exodus 20:13)

So far, we've learned a series of principles.

- God highly values Human life. It's the reason he created our planet.
- Our enemy the Devil hates God, so he hates humans. He assigns humans no value – they are to be eliminated. And he lies a lot.
- Sadly, many people allow sin to blind their eyes. Sin clouds our eyes so that we don't see the way God values human life.
- People become angry. Sometimes, this leads to violence.

Fast forward to the land of Israel in the days of Jesus. The religious leaders had become corrupt. They were religious leaders, but they weren't righteous. They had the Law and the Prophets, but they were misunderstanding those writings.

Let's read again:

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. (Matthew 5:21-22)

Jesus introduces what many commentators call a “formula”: “You have heard that is was said”, “but I tell you”. Here’s why he had to do that. The Jewish people in the days of Jesus had a problem. The Law and the Prophets were written in Hebrew. However, most of the common people spoke a language called Aramaic. It was based on Hebrew, but different enough that many didn’t understand when the Scripture was read. So, people had to trust the teachers. As we’ve been learning, the teachers didn’t always get it right. They taught things, but Jesus needed to correct what people heard.

In this case, the Pharisees taught a rule, but they missed the principle on which the rule was based. As we learned, the Law of Moses does state, “You shall not murder”. But it doesn’t talk about a judgement (Some translations say “court”).

The Pharisees and teachers of the Law focused solely on the penalty, but not the principle. The principle is that human life is valuable to God. Jesus says, “You want to talk about Judgement?” Human life is so valuable to God that it’s even dangerous to let yourself get angry at another person.

That’s scary. We all get angry, don’t we? That’s right, we all do. That’s just one of the reasons why we need God’s help. God’s standards are much higher than ours. We live in a world where all the price tags got changed.

In some cases, we’re the ones who changed them. God’s standard is that humans are so valuable we must work to avoid being angry. We don’t like that, so we change the price tag. We say, “Hey, everybody gets angry, right? So, it’s OK.” We don’t understand that when we do that, we’re diminishing human worth.

That’s what the Pharisees did. They picked out the Scriptures that made them feel good. Most people haven’t murdered anyone. So they picked out the verse that said “You Shall Not Murder”, and moved on. They didn’t teach about the places in the Scripture that pointed out the danger of anger.

Here’s the problem: As we learned in our last session, there’s something else that matters to God. It’s our hearts. Your heart matters to the master. God wants us to have pure hearts - clean hearts.

Think about this: What stops us from murdering people? Lots of things. Maybe we fear getting caught? In that case, we fear punishment. Maybe we were taught by strict parents? If that’s true, we fear a loss of approval. Maybe we think that if we try to hit someone, they may hit back? Now, we fear injury. In each of these cases, we all have bad hearts - Angry hearts. It’s only fear that keeps us from hurting someone else. It’s only the penalty that keeps us out of trouble.

Further, in each of these cases and more, we were raised in the environment where God placed us. So, whatever it is that keeps us from acting on our anger, it was given to us by God. In some

cases, God withdraws his grace and doesn't give people restraints to their anger. Those people commit violence. In each of these cases, our hearts are all the same. We are all sinful. The difference between us and others who commit evil is that some receive a gift from God that restrains them.

So, the answer isn't to lower the standards. The answer isn't to join in on changing the price tags. The answer is to come before God and confess our anger as sin. The answer is to ask God to change our hearts so that we have the ability to forgive those who have caused us to be angry.

Our Lord himself is the example. When he went to the cross he was falsely accused. That would make me angry. He was beaten. He had thorns driven into his head. He was forced to carry his own heavy cross up a hill. He was nailed to that cross. He was mocked and spat upon by the crowd. If there was ever a time to say, "Hey, everybody gets angry", that would have been it. But here's what Jesus said:

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."
(Luke 23:34)

Jesus looked out over a crowd of people who caused him so much pain, we can't even imagine. But he saw the value of the people in that crowd. He could have called for fire from heaven. Instead, he asked his Father to forgive them.

Jesus goes on telling his disciples how valuable human life is:

Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. (Matthew 5:22)

OK. We get it. We won't kill anyone. That has a penalty. We won't even physically hurt someone. That has a penalty, too. ***So, we'll just hurt them psychologically.***

Scholars aren't quite sure what the word "Raca" means. Some say it means, "empty head". Others say, "Block head". Others just say "worthless". These are all words that are intended to hurt.

'Fool' is a word that might have been used in the days of Jesus. Today we prefer words like 'idiot' and 'moron'. The result is the same. We're angry at someone, and we want to hurt them.

Right now, someone is ready to ask: "So, is there anything we can do when someone hurts us or others?"

Here are the things we can do. First, we need to understand that God's values are sometimes very different than ours. We need to accept this and take it to heart. We need to ask God to forgive us for our anger. We need to ask God to forgive others for their wrongs against us. -That's what Jesus did. We need to ask God to forgive us for letting our anger cloud our hearts to the value of other humans.

Then, we take a deep breath. We need to ask God to give us a vision for how valuable other people are. In particular, the one who hurt you.

It's also OK to run. It's OK to remove yourself from situations where you're being hurt.
- No masochists needed in church.

It's fair to inform someone they've done something that has hurt you or others - If your purpose in doing so is to build them up. It's fair to inform people that they're acting foolishly - If your purpose is to warn them that they're endangering themselves and others, and if your hope is to see them saved from their foolishness. That's different than blurting out insults.

Jesus gives us more motivation:

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 them; then come and offer your gift.
(Matthew 5:23-24)

Jesus wants this principle first and foremost for his disciples, the one who call each other "brother" and "sister". He wants the whole faith community to have right hearts. Jesus tells us that angry hearts hurt our ability to worship. We don't have our whole heart if a big piece of our heart is angry. Sometimes, we know that we're the one that hurt others. So, we're interfering with their worship. We may think we can hide our anger and our sin, but God sees.

Jesus uses an illustration from the religious life of the Jewish people. He's speaking to people in Galilee. If they wanted to make an offering at the temple, they had to travel about 5 days. This is so important Jesus says they should leave their offering and make the 5-day journey home. Then, travel 5 days back to make the offering.

Many relate this to Communion. If you realize you need to straighten out a bad relationship, will let the plate pass by. That's a good idea. Communion is for people with right hearts.

Jesus gives one more incentive:

Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, 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. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. (Matthew 5:25-26)

Jesus says this is serious. In those days, if someone had a legal issue with you, they could take you to court. Today, people can take us to court, too. However, if you're put in prison, you won't be chained to the wall and fed scraps. For centuries, time in prison was horrific. Any time before the court met, you could try to work things out. Once the court started though, you were stuck with the results. The judgement could be severe.

Jesus warns us to take this seriously. Don't wait. Don't let anger pile up.

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

Today, we've learned another thing that matters to the master: Human life. Human life is so valuable, that God wants us to take care to avoid even being angry with our fellow man. We don't always get this, because we live in a world that's like the department store where mischievous kids changed all the price tags.

But remember our saying:

For the Master to be your Master, what matters to the Master must matter to you.

Let's pray that God will help us to get the price tags back in the right place.