

What matters to the Master – Life, Part 2

From the Series “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”

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Introduction

Many of the people reading this are old enough to remember the morning of September 11, 2001. It's one of those events that makes people remember exactly where they were when they heard of it.



I was at work. I was walking down a corridor when a coworker looked out of her cubicle and said, “a plane just flew into the World Trade Center.” My first thought jumped to the small tourist planes that used to buzz around New York City. Perhaps one of them had gotten too close to a building and a tragic accident had taken place? Tragic, but small.

When I logged onto the Internet though, I learned the size of the plane. Then, after watching for a while with my co-workers, we saw the horrible sight of one of those massive towers crashing down. Then, the other.

Then, we all learned: This was an attack. We were under attack. Those are life-changing words: We are under attack. We are at war.

In this case, the war started when something that was an iconic symbol of America, the World Trade Center Twin towers, were reduced to rubble.

I have at different times used the illustration of war. We've discussed times when people lived at peace one day, and then found out they were at war. They were being attacked. That's going to be an important theme for us today.



Methodology - (How we're going about this)

We're working our way systematically through the book of Matthew. Currently, our study places us in the "Sermon on the Mount". When most commentators work through this section of Scripture, they usually look directly at the topics Jesus discusses. So, listeners hear topics like:

- problems with the religious leaders of the day
- the condition of the human heart
- What Jesus thinks about things like giving or prayer

And those are certainly important. In our series, we're going deeper. I believe there are things that are important to God. They matter to him. We started by merely introducing that concept. You know the summary statement by now:

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

In the days of Jesus, these things that mattered were under attack. In fact, those things have always been under attack. They've been under attack from the Garden of Eden, and they're still under attack today. So, to fully understand the things Jesus discusses in this section of Scripture, you need to understand four things.

- First, what are the things that are under attack?
 - What matters to the master – hence our series title.
- Second, how were they under attack at the time Jesus spoke?
- Next, how have they been attacked over time?
- Finally, we need application.
 - How are they under attack today?
 - What should we do in response?

First, we learned that God's Word matters to the Master. It was under attack. We learned that, from the earliest days of creation, God has been speaking. He shares his heart and mind with us. His prophets write down the things he says.

This was attacked in the Garden of Eden, when the Serpent asked the question, "Did God really say..." He wanted Adam and Eve to doubt God's word. In the days of Jesus, the Word of God was under attack by nothing less than religious leaders. The Pharisees and teachers of the law, people who should have been the most righteous people in the Hebrew nation, were diminishing important parts of God's word. We learned that in more recent times, religious leaders do this also. They pick and choose the Scripture that they like, teaching only "happy verses". In response, we learned that we must honor the whole Word of God.

In our last session, we learned that Human life matters to the master. In Genesis 1, we read that God created the heavens and the earth. We learn about stages. God creates light. God creates the land and the seas. He creates plants. He creates fish and birds and animals. Every time God creates, he calls it "Good".

Then God adds humans. Only then did he say, “Very Good”. We learned that God created humans in his image. Only humans have this distinction. Humans are very, very special to God. Human life matters to the Master.

Again, this came under attack in the Garden. When Adam and Eve doubted God’s word, they lost the ability to give proper value to the things that matter. We said the problem is like the story of mischievous children who changed the price tags in a department store. Recall in that story that expensive things like a mink coat got the price tags of a cheap plastic replacement button and vice-versa. Things that matter to the master are often regarded with little value by many residents of planet earth. Conversely, humans often assign great value to things that aren’t important to God.

We saw this demonstrated in the story of Cain and Abel. Cain became angry. His anger caused him to entertain sin. Sin became violence, and Cain murdered his brother Abel. One of the problems of sin is that it causes us to devalue human life. Cain should have seen his brother as valuable. If he believed that, he would have cherished his brother. Instead of valuing his brother, Cain saw Abel as someone who was in the way. He saw Abel as someone who needed to be removed.

By the time we see the topic in Matthew 5, this value is under attack by the Pharisees. They diminished parts of God’s word. So, they taught people that murder was bad, but they were missing the underlying principle. - It’s anger and sin that lead to violence. Anger and sin make us miss the value that God places on human life. You can’t just say, “Hey, I didn’t murder anyone today, so I’m OK.” We need to look more closely at our hearts.

In this session, we’re going to look more closely at this principle. We’ve learned that Human Life matters to the master. We’ve learned how it was under attack in the day of Jesus. So today, we’re going to see how the principle has come under attack in the past, and how it’s under attack today.

Let’s start.

I. Human life is attacked when people underestimate God.

Let’s revisit the story of Cain and Abel. Recall that God warned Cain about his problem with anger:

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)

What does Cain do?

8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. (Genesis 4:8)

Now understand: This is pre-meditated. Cain has a plan – he's going to take his brother out to the field **where he thinks no one can see**. He's correct that his parents can't see. But he has totally underestimated God. He thinks he can act with no consequences, so he attacks his brother and kills him.

Now, watch what happens next:

9 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" (v. 9)

Cain totally underestimates the size of God. God isn't asking about Abel's location because he doesn't know. The all-seeing God knows very well what has happened. **He's offering Cain a chance to confess**. He's offering Cain a chance to accept responsibility. Not only has Cain underestimated God's size, but Cain has underestimated God's character. God is merciful. Even at this point, Cain could have shown remorse for what he did. God would have forgiven. Instead, Cain treats God with total contempt. He thinks God is asking because he doesn't know.

And look at this: Cain thinks that he can intimidate God. "Am I my brother's keeper?" Have you ever been asked a question, and you get the distinct sense that the person asking wants to put the word, "stupid" at the end? They don't, but it's implied. In other words, Cain was saying, "Am I my brother's keeper, **stupid?**"

Cain thinks God is going to reply by saying, "Oh, no. You're right". "That really was a dumb question, huh?" "What made me think you would know where your brother was?" "I'm so sorry to bother you. I'll go look myself."

Cain has totally underestimated the size and power of God. So much so that he thinks he can intimidate his Creator. Add to this, he's about to find out that he has totally underestimated the size of the crime he has committed.

10 The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. 11 Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand." (v 10-11)

God has seen. God knows. More than that, the infinite and all-knowing God understands the creation that he has made. Human life is so important to God, that he has created a kind of cosmic connection between humans and the earth. He says that shed blood cries out from the ground. It creates a curse.

Sin clouded Cain's eyes. He failed to see the size of God. Because he failed to see the size of God, he devalued human life. And so, he attacked human life. Then, he failed to see the size of the crime he had committed.

We don't have time to go into all the details, but the problem with the human race got much worse. Let's look at just one example: A few generations after Cain came a man named "Lamech". Here's his story:

23 Lamech said to his wives,
"Adah and Zillah, listen to me;
wives of Lamech, hear my words.
I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for injuring me.
24 If Cain is avenged seven times,
then Lamech seventy-seven times."
(Genesis 4:23-24)

Lamech was a violent man. He said, "Someone stepped on my toe, so I stepped on his head. You think Cain was bad, you ain't seen nothin yet..."

After more centuries of this, God looked at the world. Here's what he saw:

5 The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. (Genesis 6:5)

The human race was going bad, and fast. The Bible uses the word "wickedness". The human heart was "only evil all the time." The amount of blood spilled must have been staggering.

The corruption had grown so great that it started a kind of fire. And only one thing would put that fire out: The great flood. The evil had become so great, the whole planet had to be wiped clean. This is another story for another day. Suffice it to say that after a terrible judgment, the human race was allowed to start again. This time, there were some rules. One of them we mentioned in the first session.

And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being. 6 "Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind. (Genesis 9:6)

To put it simply: ***Murder must have an official legal status in any human society. It must be a crime punishable by death.*** The reason given is clear. The death penalty does not exist to deter crime. ***It is given to demonstrate and uphold the value of human life.*** Humans are made in God's image. That gives them incredible value. Those who devalue human life must pay.

Here's how important this principle is: In Deuteronomy 21, Moses gave instructions on what to do if someone found a dead body. The leaders of the nearest town were to take a bull, a very expensive commodity in those days. They were to sacrifice it. Then the leaders were to perform a ceremony. During the ceremony, they had to say this:

“Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done. 8 Accept this atonement for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, Lord, and do not hold your people guilty of the blood of an innocent person.” (Deuteronomy 21:7-8(a))

Moses gave the result of this ceremony:

Then the bloodshed will be atoned for, 9 and you will have purged from yourselves the guilt of shedding innocent blood, since you have done what is right in the eyes of the Lord. (v 8(b)-9)

Note - This ceremony would only work in the following situation: There was a sincere belief that no one knew who did it. It was not enough to say, “Well, I know who did it, but it wasn't me.” Anyone who saw; anyone who knew was to speak up. Purposely looking the other way didn't measure up. If anyone knew who was guilty, justice required the penalty be paid.

At this point a question comes up: Is the death penalty for today? I'll give a personal opinion: I believe the death penalty is valid and in some cases required today. In particular, it is valid for murder when there has been a carefully conducted trial by the authorities. Things have changed since old testament days. However, the principle given to us in Genesis 9 is eternal. It states that the death penalty for murder is meant to demonstrate and uphold the value of life.

Sadly, we're going to have to stop there for now and more on.

II. Human life comes under attack when people abandon God.

In the case of Cain, he believed in God. At that time in history, God was still speaking to people directly. How could Cain believe otherwise? At other times in history though, people have abandoned God. They either follow false gods, or they leave the idea of God all together.

When people who believe in God fall into sin, their eyes are clouded. Their ability to see what matters to God is diminished. When people abandon God, all sense of value disappears. This is when the price tags, so to speak, all get changed.

A. Chattel Slavery

One of the things that happens when people abandon God is what I'll call "Chattel Slavery". Slavery in the Bible is hard to discuss. Here's why: there is one word for service that is used three ways. The meaning changes based on context.

1) Indentured Servant

First is the "indentured servant". Sometimes in earlier days people could provide service to others with a long-term contract. They would agree on a given amount of time, with a sum of money paid at the end. In the meantime, the person making payment provided food, clothing, and lodging for the servant. When a worker accepts this arrangement, they become an "indentured servant". If this was done correctly, it could be a profitable arrangement for everyone. Like many forms of service, it's not perfect. If the employer is dishonest, bad things happen. We'll talk about that in future sessions.

2) Prisoners of War

Second concerns Prisoners of War. Today, when wars break out, we have achieved an international system where rules are applied to winners and losers. When soldiers are captured on the battlefield, they become prisoners of war. When a conflict ends, treaties are negotiated that involve return of prisoners.

In ancient days, there were not such arrangements. So, dealing with prisoners of war presented a dilemma. Releasing enemy combatants was not an option. Freed soldiers could come back and attack you the next day. For nations who did not know God, loss on the battlefield meant one of two options. First was execution. Second was a life of slavery. The second option was considered humane.

On several occasions, nations attacked Israel and lost. The Law made provision for how the losers were to be treated. Enemy combatants were made into slaves who were treated under special laws. It was not a perfect system, but it was far more humane than people were treated under the laws of the surrounding nations.

3) Chattel Slavery

The final category for the word we translate as "servant" is chattel slavery. Chattel slavery is the name given to the following act: An evil person kidnaps another so that the victim can be sold into slavery.

Here is what the Law of Moses said about this:

Anyone who kidnaps someone is to be put to death, whether the victim has been sold or is still in the kidnapper's possession. (Exodus 21:16)

Understand this: Kidnapping someone for the purpose of selling them into slavery was a death penalty offense. It happens when someone abandons God.

As we've been saying, God deeply values Humans. He tells us this in his Word. When people abandon God, they have no real mechanism to assign worth to others. So, you get what I'll call "Mind over Matter". We don't mind, others don't matter.

One way this manifests itself is for one group of people to look at another and say, "they're not worth as much as us. Therefore, we don't have to assign them full rights as human." There are two results: The first is slavery if others are thought to be useful. The other is elimination or genocide if a group is thought to be dangerous.

Concerning Slavery: Tragically, societies from the beginning of time have practiced some form of chattel slavery. The Romans took slaves from the European regions to the north east of Rome. So many slaves came from that region that it was named "Slavia". That's why we talk today about "Slavic" nations.

One area that doesn't get discussed much is African slavery of Africans. From early days the Egyptians battled the Ethiopians and the Nubians. Losers from any conflict became slaves.

Muslims from what is now called the "Middle East" took slaves from Africa for centuries. Those of you who like to research things on the Internet can look up the "Zanj Rebellion", that took place in the late 800s A.D. It was the Muslims who taught the rest of the world how to kidnap free people from Africa and make them into slaves. Muslims continued the practice well after Europeans and Americans gave it up.

Tragically, the United States fell to this horrible practice. That's a whole lot of history that we can't cover in detail today. Let's focus on one aspect, the price the U.S. paid for this conflict.

We spoke of blood as having a cosmic effect. Abraham Lincoln believed this, and he believed that the Civil War was a judgment of God on our nation. Here is a quote from his second inaugural address:

Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the

judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." (Lincoln - Inaugural Address, March 14, 1865)

America paid for the crime of slavery. 600,000 men from each side died. A small percentage of those were some very noble Africans who had been freed but chose to join the fight. Most though were of European descent. That was more than WW1 and WW2 combined. Further, it was the highest percentage of the population killed in any war. In WW2, three out of every thousand citizens were killed. In the Civil War, it was 20 out of every thousand.
- almost 7 times greater.

Whole cities were burned to the ground. These include Richmond, Virginia and Atlanta, Georgia. The economy of the United States was wrecked. America paid a heavy price for the sin of Chattel Slavery. Those who supported slavery in the South paid. Those from the North who looked the other way paid. That was the cost of chattel slavery.

B. Human Sacrifice

Next, we need to talk about human sacrifice. I'm going to define human sacrifice in a broad way. When people abandon God, they lose the value of Human life. The value of human life comes under attack. One manifestation of this occurs when one human decides that the death of another human is profitable in some way.

One example is the sacrifice of people to gods. It's thought that sacrifice makes gods give us things. The bigger the sacrifice, the more you can make the gods do for you. This leads to the sacrifice of humans.

When Moses spoke to the people of God, he warned against following idols in any way. But one of the false gods stood out. He was called "Molech". Let's read about him:

21 "Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molek, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the Lord. (Leviticus 18:21)

The phrase "Give your children" meant, kill your children and offer their bodies to Molech.

One ancient Hebrew king who did this was Ahaz:

3 He followed the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, engaging in the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. (2 kings 16:3)

Another was Manasseh:

He sacrificed his own son in the fire... (2 kings 21:6)

Along the way, some good kings arose who tried to end this practice. One was Josiah.

10 He desecrated Topheth, which was in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, so no one could use it to sacrifice their son or daughter in the fire to Molek. (2 kings 23:10)

The valley of Ben Hinnom was the location of one of the altars used by idolaters to sacrifice children to Molech. So, Josiah killed the pagan priest who did this and burned their bodies there. Since that time, it became a rubbish heap. Trash was always burning there.

Later, Jesus used this as a symbol of hell. It's where we get the Greek word, "Gehenna". So, understand this: When Jesus chose a symbol of Hell, he chose the location of judgement for child sacrifice.

Important note: Of all the ways to sin against God, there is none more loathsome than killing a child for profit. This sin, along with many others, caused a terrible judgement on the children of Israel. In the sixth century B.C. the Jewish people saw the city of Jerusalem burned to the ground. The people were forced to live as exiles in Babylon.

B. Genocide

We don't have time to go into all the atrocities that have occurred over time. As I said a few moment ago, Genocide occurs when one group thinks another is in the way. We'll just mention some of the worst in the modern era. Adolf Hitler murdered 7 million people in the concentration camps. He represented the Nazis, a word that means "National Socialists". Joseph Stalin is credited with 20 million deaths. He was a Communist, or "International Socialist". He led a nation called the USSR. That stood for "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics".

That's why Christians get very concerned about the rise of Socialism. Socialists promise Utopia: A place where everyone is taken care of. Healthcare is free. College education is free. Free, free, free. But once socialists get into power, people start to die. They die because socialism denies God. It's an atheist system. So, there is no basis in Socialism for human life having value.

The Nazis were a particular problem. The Germans have a word for life: "Leben". The Nazis added a modifier to that: "Wertes", a word that means "worthy". So, there was "Leben und Lebensunwertes". There was "life" and "unworthy life". Life that was not "worthy" could and should be stopped. It was the responsibility of "worthy people" to rid the world of "unworthy" life. This led to the gas chambers. Germany was heavily judged for her crimes.

Things gets worse.

C. Abortion

The Bible teaches that Human Life starts at conception.

13 For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
(Psalm 139:13-14)

The Psalm writer says that Human Life starts in the womb. Not when a child is born. But in our modern world where God has been abandoned, people take it upon themselves to play God. They look at a child in the womb and say, "Let's decide if it's worthy." If someone thinks the child is unwanted, then it's not worthy. If it's thought to be too expensive, it's not worthy. If it's sick or handicapped, it's not worthy.

Then people become like Cain. Cain thought that he could go out to a field and God would not see. Today people think that no one sees the child in the womb. They can take a woman to a clinic. There, a doctor can rip the child from the womb and put it into the trash, and no one will know. But like the time that Cain murdered Abel, God sees.

There are many who see little difference between this and the spirit of Molech. We destroy children in the pursuit of prosperity.

In 1973, the brightest minds in our country, the judges on America's Supreme court, decided a case called "Roe v. Wade" In that decision, they declared that a child in the womb was not a human life. Therefore, it could be destroyed at will. In this decision, the brightest minds in America declared that abortion is a constitutional right. Other laws have been created that protect the destruction of a child all the way to birth. Since the Roe v Wade decision, 60 million children have been murdered. 60 million. The bodies of these children were classified as "medical waste" and thrown out.

How could such a thing happen? This is what happens when people abandon God. They hold no value for human life. Like Cain, they believe they can sneer at God and say, "Hey Big Guy – What are you going to do about it?"

Here are some questions: Does the blood of these children cry out from the ground? It has at other times. Does their blood create a curse? It has at other times. Will our nation be judged? Other nations have been judged – why not us?

Conclusion

Today we've learned that human life matters to the Master. We've also learned that the value of human life is under attack. When humans underestimate God they think they can get away with murder. When humans abandon God, they lose the value of human life. Slavery, Genocide, and Abortion follow.

Will God bring judgement on us? If so, to avoid judgement, we must do some things. We must take to heart the things that matter to our Master. Human life matters. We must understand that this value is under attack. "Under attack" needs to mean something to us.

We must go to God's Word for instruction. We must make all murders a crime. This includes abortion.

We must warn. Since Roe v. Wade, 60 million children have been murdered. At some point, the combined blood of all those children will cry so loudly that judgment will come. Some think it may be starting already.

We must pray for repentance and revival. In our Churches. In our nation. In our own hearts.

We must get the price tags back in the right place. We must ask God to help us to embrace his values.

We must take to heart these words: ***For the Master to be your Master, what matters to the Master must matter to you.***

Let's pray and ask that God will help us to value human life as he does.