**Matthew 5:21-37 (ESV)**

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' [22] But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. [23] So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, [24] leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. [25] Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. [26] Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

[27] "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' [28] But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. [29] If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. [30] And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

[31] "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' [32] But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

[33] "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' [34] But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, [35] or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. [36] And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. [37] Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

**“Straight to the heart”**

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. During the cold month of February comes the warmer celebration of Valentine’s Day. Love is the central theme. The personal kind shared between two people. Girls like to get mushy and guys just do not get it. Hearts abound as the symbol in candy and on cards. Just as red covers pretty much everything from flowers to teddy bears. All this crammed into one day to express the deepest depths of love. Yet, there is also a contradiction that comes with it. Valentine’s Day receive its name from St. Valentine a priest who died for marrying couples against the will of the Roman Emperor.[[1]](#footnote-1) At the same time, we have cupid who floats around as that iconic figure for the day, but represents “the god of desire, affection and erotic love.[[2]](#footnote-2)” This confusion over love is why sinful humanity needs the love of God to save us.

Jesus in His sermon on the mount addresses love, but He deals with it in terms of relationship. So powerful are the words He speaks. They go straight to the heart of anyone. Certainly there is moral teaching, but Jesus is far beyond morals regulated by a society. As God’s Son, the promised Messiah, His goal is to get the heart of the matter to save sinners. Love is not a feeling or reason, but first and foremost being in a right relationship. In other words, repentance and faith is a matter of the heart before God. However, rather than a private concern behind closed doors, Jesus takes up the whole matter publicly before everyone. He steps around the superficial acts and gestures made up by all. The true righteousness of Christ goes straight to the heart to save us.

Only Jesus truly understood the brokenness between God and man. In order for righteousness to exceed that of the Pharisees a person would have to go outside of the Law. The right relationship with the Father in heaven could not be based on works, but faith in God’s Son. Sounds simple enough, but not when the hearts of men are hard against any need for the savior. The Pharisees had quite the elaborate system to stay within the laws demands. At least that is how it appeared on the outside. Jesus by His Sermon on the Mount shatters this self-righteous system because the answer is not in managing a sinner to be a little less sinful. Instead, the right relationship to God by faith is purely a gift apart from whatever we could do. Since man neither creates faith nor can find it, everything rests on Jesus choosing to enter our hearts of sins.

What does the savior find? Exactly what He knew was there from the start, broken a relationship broken between God and others. Jesus points this out addressing the three commandments on murder, adultery and false vows. Anyone can recognize a killer who makes it on the 24hrs news. Yet, can we confess the anger that simply resides in our hearts? Grudges, resentment, hatred all stab at the neighbor. Anyone can recognize an adulterer because they abandoned the love for their wife or husband. Yet, can we confess our unfaithful hearts that naturally lust? Eyes wander to whatever looks pleasing, affection can be felt from someone else, and thoughts of divorce already desire the easy way out. Anyone can recognize the politician who breaks an oath to the people. Yet, can we confess that our heart do not keep promises very well? The slightest lie, the intent to deceive, the least sincere word all work for our best interests.

Plenty give the answer for today’s troubles are to go back to the good old days. However, the hearts of men in those days were not so good either. Condoms were handed out to soldiers for to “play it safe” in World War II. Anger flourished during the 1960’s with many atrocious acts taking place. Lies are also so evident among men it seems one finds them in every age and family. The brokenness of this world is precisely that broken. Jesus shows the source of sin does not come from the eye, hand, or any part of man. We cannot get rid of it. No, it is the sorry state of our hearts that brings about such sadness before God. C.F.W. Walther wrote,

“This fear ought to teach us to sigh for the mercy of God and to trust in it. Where this fear is lacking, we trust not so much in the mercy of God as in our own conscience and in the fact that we are not conscious of having committed any gross sins. Such people will meet with a fearful judgment” (L & G 331).

What stabs at the heart is the loving Word of Jesus who shuts out all excuses so what we have left is to repent and believe in Him.

What do we find in the heart of Jesus? He is the undying love of God. His righteousness gives us the right relationship before the Father in Heaven. Man’s heart opened up with murderous anger, unlawful actions, and false words against the only Son of God. In turn, the Father judged unrighteous humanity in Christ on the cross who is the perfect sacrifice between sinful man and holy God. Straight from Jesus’ heart is all the forgiveness, life and salvation anyone would ever need. In other words, big sins and small sins have the same Savior. Jesus has reconciled the situation by His sacrifice. The sinless Son of God has been faithful to a sinful world. As the Psalmist declared, “The Lord has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations” (Psalm 98:2). His love does abound unhindered since He is risen from the dead to be our righteous judge who rules by the cross. There can be no confusion over the sincerity and purity of this love. Jesus has left Himself in the Word and Sacraments. He is the gift for our hearts to receive and believe in His saving Name.

Whatever is broken off by our cold hearts God warms by His Son to bring back together. The Holy Sprit poured into the baptized fights against all sin, death and the Devil in our life. As St. Paul said, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” This means there is a war going on in my hearts. King David had this desire when He cried to the Lord after His adultery with Bathsheba saying, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10). There is no way to continue in sin as if there is no savior. No matter how small, there is a change at work in us. The Spirit of Christ desires to reconcile the anger and bitterness I hold against another, wants me to honor my spouse by true love of sacrifice, and longs for me to be honest toward others. Of course, none can find hope in their life as if my heart or actions are pure without Jesus. This is why our Lutheran Fathers said,

“Christ does not stop being mediator after our renewal. It is an error to suppose that he merely merited ‘initial grace’ and that afterward we please God and merit eternal life by our keeping of the law. Christ remains the mediator” (Tappert 129:162).

So long as Jesus remains savior, then the sinner has all the purity we need to serve without fear or regret. It is better than a superficial love that just wants to look good or to fit in to the norm. All of God’s love is packed not into a single day, but into His Son. The true righteousness of Christ goes straight to the heart to save us. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valentine%27s\_Day [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cupid [↑](#footnote-ref-2)