

Breaking Bad

August 5, 2018

“Guilty of Character Assassination?”

Text: Exodus 20:13, Genesis 9:5-6, Matthew 5:21-26

Here we go. We are starting the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the Breaking Bad series today. Glad you're still with us. I am a little curious about something though. How many of you planned their summer vacation based upon which week we were in? Be honest. You guys looked ahead, didn't you?

July 1 - No other gods

July 8 - Don't make idols

July 15 - Don't Misuse God's Name

July 22 - Keep the Sabbath Holy – We were driving home from Vermont that day. I kept it holy by praying the whole way for light traffic. I also did a solid job of not breaking # 3; well, maybe once, outside of Danbury, when that guy was weaving in and out at 90 mph..

July 29 - Honor Your Father and Mother

August 5 - Do Not Murder

But I'm fairly curious about the rationale that was used to make today's decision – “Thou Shalt Not Murder”. For those that aren't here today, I'm curious. Was it:

- My plans were made before I knew about the sermon schedule
- I'm pretty safe with this one. I figured I don't need to be there
- I didn't want the guilt trip in front of the people that think they know me

How about you guys; that are here today. Was it:

- My plans were made before I knew about the sermon schedule
- I'm pretty safe with this one. I figured it was safe to be here
- Yeah, I've got a secret that I need to hear from God about

I'm guessing that most of us felt this week was going to be pretty safe. After all, it's a very clear instruction to obey and doesn't come with the gray areas we've addressed in some of the other weeks such as:

Thou shalt not take the Lord's name in vain – does this mean no cursing, not using God's name as a curse or is it something more complicated?

Keep the Sabbath holy – What if I have a job? Can I cut the lawn? Can I cook for my family on Sunday?

And yet, maybe even this one isn't as simple as how I'm putting it, or how we think about it. And one of the reasons is because, as with a lot of scripture, the bible translation has something to do with it. Let's look at some different translations of Exodus 20:13

You shall not murder. Exodus 20:13 (NIV)

Thou shalt not kill. Exodus 20:13 King James Version (KJV)

You must not murder. Exodus 20:13 New Living Translation (NLT)

Thou shalt not kill. Exodus 20:13 American Standard Version (ASV)

No murder. Exodus 20:13 The Message (MSG)

Or,

New Russian Translation (NRT)

Не убивай. New Russian Translation (NRT)

Yeah, I have no idea what that one says.

But do you see what the problem is there? Is it murder, or kill? Our definition is different for each. According to Merriam Webster the definition of murder is: “the crime of unlawfully killing a person especially with malice aforethought.” The definition of kill is: “to deprive of life: cause the death of”. Murder defined means the death of another person, kill could mean anything. So which was meant in the sixth commandment? Well the Hebrew word that was actually used was “ratsach”. Ratsach generally refers to the premeditated taking of a human life. Compare that

word with the more common Hebrew word, “harag”. Harag is a more general word for kill, which could be used towards animals or in combat etc.

In addition, I have a hard time accepting the “kill” translation for one big reason: the Old Testament atonement of sin through sacrifice. Do you see the contradiction? I commit a sin, so I would go to the temple, to do what? To present a sacrifice to God. Maybe a ram, or a goat, or doves; whatever. If I kill the animal as a sacrifice, have I now have broken the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment, which would mean that I need to atone for my sin. How do I do that? By presenting a sacrifice to God. I believe that we would call that a circular argument. Or if you’re a Microsoft excel user, a circular reference.

Now I know there are people that become vegetarians because they don’t like the idea of killing animals, and there’s nothing wrong with that. But if you are using the commandment as the justification for it then I hope you’re asking God for forgiveness the next time you step on an ant, or swat that mosquito on your arm.

But even without the animal factor, how do we know exactly what God is referring to here? Is his definition of kill and murder the same as our definition? And of course, as a society, we even have various degrees of charges for taking another life. There’s 1<sup>st</sup> degree and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree murder; voluntary and involuntary manslaughter. There’s self-defense, abortion, combat and capital punishment. How can we really be sure on when it is a sin, and when it’s not?

God’s desire that we not murder is not just brought up in the commandments. It was an important prelude to his covenant with Noah in Genesis 9.

5 And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. 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 9:5-6 (NIV)

Here, in Genesis, God is giving pretty clear instructions, that are really even more stringent than the actual commandment he later gives. God demands an accounting from us for any shedding of human blood. It’s pretty clear that he is not giving us the decisive vote here. He isn’t differentiating between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree murder, manslaughter or any of the others we’ve discussed so far. We need to go before God any time that we take the life away from another human. To confess what we have done and ask for his forgiveness. Consider two very significant reasons to do this.

1. What does the act do to you? To take another life, no matter what the reason, must pack an emotional and psychological punch. To borrow a quote from Harry Potter when Professor Horace Slughorn was speaking with Tom Riddle: “Yes. Killing rips the soul apart. It’s a violation against nature.” While I understand that this is from a movie, I believe there is often truth in fiction.
2. What does the act do to God? I’d like to clear one this up. During last week’s message, I mentioned that the first 4 commandments were given to us in order to improve our relationship with God. The rest of the commandments are about our relationships with each other. I did not mean to imply that commandments 5 through 10 did not have any

affect in our relationship with God. All of the commandments are important in our relationship with God. I saw something posted to Facebook the other day that I thought summed this up well: “You will never look into the eyes of someone that God does not love. Always be kind.” (Shout out to Christine if she is there)

Most of us are still probably feeling pretty good right now, despite some of the variations and situations that we have discussed. And if our bibles ended with the book of Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament, well, all would be good. But it doesn't end there. There is another section in this book called the New Testament and very early on we come across Jesus's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. And it says:

### Murder

<sup>21</sup> “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.’ <sup>22</sup> 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.

Matthew 5:21-22 (NIV)

People read this and they wonder, “Why is Jesus changing the rules?” He's not. He is doing what he did throughout his ministry. He's explaining the rules. And there are a couple of important things to think of here.

- Where does the murder actually start?
  - Discussion
  - Anger within
  - Hatred exposed
  - The idea forms
  - The act of murder

Let's say you're having a conversation with a friend. The talk turns towards, oh, let's say politics. Now we know how wide that divide is nowadays and it runs from the far right to the far left – extremes on both sides. Most people that I know tend to be closer to the middle though – on either side. And yet, when we disagree with people, we seem to automatically assume that they are taking an extreme position – *while we, of course are very reasonable and closer to the middle*. Anyway, back to our conversation: You begin to discuss something you read, or saw on tv. And very quickly you realize how wrong this person thinks 😊 Suddenly you begin getting

annoyed inside. Your heart starts racing and your blood begins to boil. Then your feelings towards this person begin to change, at least in regards to this situation. Some of that anger begins to be exposed as a kind of hatred. Next thing you know you're thinking of ways to change the mind of your friend – maybe not by murder, but how about with a punch in the mouth. The punch in the mouth causes them to fall down the stairs and you terrifyingly find that you have killed them. Where did the murder start? Now our justice system says it starts at the act of murder, or maybe in the idea stage – conspiracy to commit. But God's view on sin isn't limited to that. As a matter of fact, if you started the discussion knowing that your friend's views were most likely going to differ from yours, the sin may have started with the discussion.

- The power of the word

There is another area that we need to concern ourselves with as well, and that is the effect on others from what we say. It is said in Revelation 1:16:

<sup>16</sup>In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. Revelation 1:16 (NIV)

The sharp, double edged sword is God's Word. Hebrews 4:12 actually says that his Word is even more powerful than the sword.

<sup>12</sup>For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Hebrews 4:12 (NIV)

Now our words do not have such power, but they can still pack quite a punch. I'm not sure if the old schoolyard taunt of, "sticks and stones can break my bones, but names will never hurt me" is still used or not. But I question the validity of the saying because we see the effect that words make on our self-worth, our confidence and our reputation. There is also a difference in the words you say to an individual, versus the words you announce to the world. If I call you a "fool" to your face I can hurt your feelings, and while it's not a nice thing to do, it's between you and me. If I call you a "fool" in public or through standard or social media, I am attacking you personally. I am, in a manner of speaking, murdering you – through character assassination.

It is doubly important in today's world because of the internet and social media. It has always been important to consider your words before you say them.

James 1:19 says

<sup>19</sup>My dear brothers and sisters; take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, James 1:19 (NIV)

Once the words are spoken, you can't take them back. Oh sure, you can apologize; you can print a retraction; you can delete the post: but once the words are said, or written, they are out there. It always makes me laugh when I'm watching Law & Order and the judge says, "The jury will disregard that statement." It's easy for the judge to say. Not so easy for the jury to **do**.

Evaluate before you act – Considering all of the options and possibilities is important to do before we begin to act. Considering the effect of what steps you take is important before you act.

Think before you speak, or write – There is an old saying, “Measure twice, cut once.” In my case it is measure 3, maybe 4, times cut once and still get it wrong. But the main point is that you should measure something twice to make sure that you have it right, and then cut. Because once you cut, you can’t uncut. The same is true when we say or write something. Always consider three things: Is what you are writing, what you are trying to say? Is the person reading it going to have a clear understanding of your intention? Remember, they won’t be able to see a smile on your face, a clear understanding of the inflection, or a way to observe your body language. And once you hit “Send”, it’s sent!

Change the way you think – Sometimes we have to change the way we think. Last week when I talked about changing the way I spoke (removing profanity from my vocabulary) I had to change the way I thought about things before I was able to change what I said. If we tend to hurt people with what we say or write, and want to change that, we need to change the way we think beforehand.

When my step-son Jimmy died of an overdose, I assumed that the drug was probably laced with fentanyl. And based on what I’ve learned since then, I am pretty convinced that whoever it was dealing the drug, probably knew exactly what he was selling. And yet when I’ve had friends suggest that drug dealers should just be put up against a wall and shot, I’ve said that I would prefer to forgive them. Prosecute them, yes. But I choose forgiveness.

And when I was asked if I would like the opportunity to spend just five minutes alone in the room with the person that sold Jimmy that fatal overdose I said sure. I’d love to have that five minutes – to share about my relationship with Jesus and what his view is of the value of human life. I’d like to share how Jesus taught, served and loved. How he cared for the adulteress and the prostitute. How he healed the leper and the blind man. How he cried at the death of Lazarus. How he loved, and commanded us to do the same.

Please pray with me.