Text: Matthew 5:21-37

**Introduction**

I just kinda wonder, how many of those present have seen any of the show “The Chosen” (Pause to see).

I have to admit I was quite late to it. I had only watched season one right before moving here. And I waited a long time to watch season 2. The biggest reason I shrugged off people telling me I had to watch it is simply I couldn’t believe it could actually be good. I’m probably too much of a critic, but so much of explicitly Christian works are just terrible. And if you are going to drag an actual representation of Jesus into your work, that only raises the bar. It seems to me that about once a generation maybe less, there is an artistic work worthy of pulling Jesus into it. And I had real trouble imagining that a streaming app would be the source of this generation’s artistic work.

But that first season was so good. I worried about this. You ever watched a sequel so bad – say Pitch Perfect 2 – that made you have to go back and reevaluate a beloved original? That is what I was afraid of with season 2. But they’ve managed to keep the quality writing.

What always gets me about representations of Jesus is that so few of them capture how strange he must have been. I don’t think The Chosen escapes this completely, but most movie or TV depictions of Jesus are better at depicting the Jesus the era they are made in desired, than in depicting the Jesus of the Gospel in all his harsh strangeness. Whether it is the hippy Jesus of Godspell or earnest authentic Jesus of The Gospel of John or the otherworldly Jesus of the earlier Epics, they all end up being encapsulations of the time they were made. Maybe in further hindsight The Chosen will still end up that, but so far they are capturing the strangeness.

And this is what I mean by the strangeness. We have had 2000 years of thinking that this man is THE CHRIST. The creeds have confessed for 1700 years that this man is The Son of God. But what must it have been like to hear something like “Come unto me all you who are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” Or to have been in the Nazareth Synagogue to hear this man who you knew as a little child read Isaiah and say, “today, in your hearing, this has been fulfilled.” Or, what much of the first season of the Chosen builds up to, to hear the Sermon on the Mount. And to hear Jesus say, “You have heard it was said to those of old.” And understand that the one speaking to those of old would be either Moses or God himself. “You have heard God said ‘You shall not murder’….but I tell you.”

Yes, the miracles would have helped a great deal. But still, I’ve always felt for the pharisees. Guy shows up and claims to be God. I’m pretty sure the first thing I’d be thinking is “blasphemy” too.

**Christology**

It is a bit of this strangeness that I really want you to hear when we read the Sermon on the Mount, especially this early section. When he “spoke with authority” it’s this strange power.

Because I think we today have one reaction when we hear things like this: “Yawn.”

If you don’t believe that Jesus is the Christ, there is really no reason to listen to him. Yes, he has some historical value. You can’t really see or read anything part of western civilization before 1800 if you don’t at least understand the claims of Christianity in a deep way. And if you look at most public school reading lists, you see that much of that is gone. They have registered their “yawn.” But maybe more importantly even believers go “yawn.” We hear these type of words of Jesus and maybe give our vague assent, but they don’t really sink in.

If we really heard God Almighty say “If you are angry with your brother you will be liable to judgement…and if you call someone a “fool” you will be liable to the fires of hell.” I think it would disturb all of us a little more. Because we are all quick to make divisions, and slow to heal them, if we try at all. If I understand how things are working today, when we are mad today a common response is ghosting. Cutting someone out of your life used to be the shock advice of Laura Slessinger, today it is common practice.

Yet what Jesus tells us is exactly the opposite. If you find yourself at the altar, and you remember that you have something against your brother. Leave whatever you’ve brought and go be reconciled first. Then come back to the altar.

We don’t remember it. Part of the “Yawn”. But this advice is still in our liturgy in a ritual way. When right before the distribution of the Body and Blood happen the minister will say “The peace of the Lord be with you.” In the very early church that used to be the time and space that these things were hashed out before the church. Nobody got the body and blood of God, unless they were also at peace with their brother. If we recognized the body of Christ, might we do this more? Can we imagine not taking because I know I have something against my brother?

Yes, there are complications. You can’t force your brother to forgive you. Jesus doesn’t really address this here. That is just a problem of the fallen world. We sin and we must live with the temporal effects of sin. Maybe long after we think those temporal effects should be over. But Jesus does warn us “settle with your accuser.” Settle before you get to the judge, because if you get to the judge, you won’t get out until you pay the last penny.

**Gospel**

It’s this image that I want to spiritualize a bit. We’ve all watched enough Law and Order or True Crime shows to absorb both: that we don’t know what way the jury will rule, and that once they have ruled it is law. Appeals are much tougher than the original case. Jails in the time of Jesus are basically death sentences. And appeals, unless you are like Paul – a Roman Citizen – are non-existent. So the stakes are even higher. Spiritualizing it a bit I think would mean this. If you demand the law, you will get the law. If you’ve got a grudge against your Christian brother or sister, or if someone thinks you’ve sinned against them, yes, you can demand the law. Get out the law of Moses and take it to God and demand your pound of flesh. The problem with that is nobody is justified by the law. You might wander into that court sure of your righteousness and find yourself in in hell. The wiser choice is to take Jesus up on his grace. He’s forgiven all of our 10,000 talents. Extend that grace to your grudges.

**Moral**

If we were struck to the heart that this Jesus really is God, I think reading passages like today might put a bit of fear in us.

Jesus is probably using hyperbole when he is talking about adultery. Not about the lustful intent part, but about cutting off parts or plucking out parts. But his legal logic isn’t wrong. It is better to lose a member than be thrown into hell whole.

And again, the problem is with the law. If we are going to go around hacking off parts to avoid sin, we won’t have too many parts left. And even then, I’d bet we’d come up with ways of sinning. Probably just envying those who hadn’t hacked off everything.

Who will deliver us from this body of death is the way that Paul would ask it?

And Jesus puts himself forward as the one who will deliver you. And he does it right there on the cross. And that body broken for you and that blood outpoured for you, is right here.

But if we don’t believe his warnings about the law, why do we need his promise? “Yawn”

**Eschatological**

I think we need to recapture a little of the strangeness of Jesus to get past our cynical “yawn.”

I’m going to end with something that might be a little strange, but hold with the story. Right now there is a vogue for psychedelic drugs. The old school one is LSD, but today they are usually talking ayahuasca or psilocybin which is amped up magic mushrooms. If you are a Packer’s fan, you might have heard the story about Aaron Rodgers’ experiments with ayahuasca. He shares that he met something that follows him. Something called “The Hat Man”. Now it has a name because evidently this is quite a regular experience among those who have taken these drugs.

Now the question is what exactly are people like Aaron Rodgers meeting? The pure materialist would simply say these experiences are all just “in your head”. And if that were true that might be the best case outcome. A growing community of users think they are having real spiritual experiences. Of course the loudest voices who say this also say two things: 1) they insist that what they are meeting are good, contrary to every spiritual tradition ever that would don’t or be very careful and 2) they insist that the people who are having bad trips are “only in their head”.

But there is a growing community of folks who have taken these drugs and come to a dramatically different course. They will insist: a) that it is a real experience but b) that most of what you meet are demons. None of these people – evidenced by the fact that they are taking drugs to begin with – entered as what you might call a fundamentalist. But on the other side of their experiences, they aren’t yawning. They sound like Han Solo in the most recent Star Wars movies, “It’s all True”. But they are talking about Jesus, Satan, Heaven and Hell. And there is an urgency in how they are living the faith. It is the only thing standing between them and what they’ve seen, which they think is hell.

Now I’ll admit pointing at drug users is probably not the best proof. But hopefully without taking psychedelics we need to hear this strange Jesus. And wake us from our spiritual slumbers.