

Series: Being the Difference

January 19-20, 2019

Title: Getting Back on Track

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Text: Matthew 5:21-26

A Matter of the Heart

Eggs:

An egg is a true wonder of nature. It contains everything necessary to produce a fully functioning little creature, all encased in a protective enclosure.

The shell alone is a masterpiece. Hold a chicken egg lengthwise between your hands, and it will take 100 pounds of pressure to break the egg. Just as importantly, the shell both allows the passage of air, but serves as a primary barrier to microbes.

But what really matters is what's going on inside the shell. The egg itself is 2/3 white or albumen – a mixture of water and protein. The other third is made up of the yolk – a nutrient rich mix of fats, proteins and vitamins.

If the egg is fertilized, it has a patch of cells on the surface of the yolk called a germinal disk. This patch of cells is programmed to grow into a baby chick. The shell is an engineering marvel; but the real story is what happens inside.

A New Take on an Old Law:

Jesus came to launch God's great rescue of His Creation. In a world enslaved by Death, Jesus came to announce that at long last the true Lord of the World was present to reclaim His realm.

Long ago, God had given core commands for the creation of this redeemed world. One of them addressed the hostility and violence that had invaded His world.

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Exodus 20:13 NIV

"You shall not murder."

This command was like the shell that protects something much more precious. Jesus was now announcing that it was time to look past the shell and think about what was growing inside it: God's Kingdom and His rescue of humanity.

Jesus put it this way:

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Matthew 5:21-22 NIV

"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. 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."

A Matter of the Heart:

No one ever committed murder without first plotting harm against the other person. Murder began in the heart. It began as hatred of the other person. It began by diminishing that person's right to live to the point of fantasizing their death.

Jesus says that when we wish someone were dead, or otherwise disparage them, we're *as guilty as if we had pointed a gun at them and pulled the trigger.*

The commandment against murder is not an excuse to hate and devalue others in every way except murder! To truly keep this command means that we will refuse to allow hostility toward another person find a home in our hearts.

A Matter of Priorities:

First things first:

So how important is it that we get this right? How important is it that we make sure our relationships are free of hate and violence – both in our thoughts as well as our actions?

Jesus says that this issue is so important, it takes precedence over worship of God Himself!

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Matthew 5:23-24 NIV

"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."

How easy to minimize something we have said or done against someone else and say, "Well, it wasn't *that* bad." How easy to compensate for hurting someone else by a display of religious devotion. But Jesus says it doesn't work that way. God isn't impressed by our religious activity if our heart is corrupt.

Ever break an egg and discover that it was rotten? Just hope you don't do it over a cake mix! The shell does all too good a job of hiding what's been going on inside! On the outside the egg looks just as good as all the others. But on the inside it's rotten to the core.

So our first priority – even above celebrating the presence of God Himself – is to make things right with someone we have wronged.

The Time is Now:

And when is the best time to do that? Well, Jesus says that the time is *now*.

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Matthew 5:25-26 NIV

"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."

Jesus is painting a picture of a person who has wronged someone else financially. Perhaps it was an unpaid debt or other obligation. The case is

going to court. The judge is going to rule on the matter if the two of you can't work it out.

So Jesus says, "Seize the time while there still is time. Make it right. Settle out of court. The time is now."

You've heard it said, "Time heals all wounds." That's not true, especially when it comes to broken relationships. The opposite is true. The longer you wait to make things right, the more entrenched both you and your adversary become in hostile thoughts and feelings. For the other person, every passing day merely reinforces the magnitude of just how wrong you are.

The only cure is to be proactive and reach out in humility, taking the blame for what you did wrong and saying you are truly sorry. There is no other way forward.

Getting Back on Track:

Hatching new life:

I'll never forget the name of the physician who delivered our first child: His name was Dr. Hatch.

When it comes to baby chicks, every one of them is Dr. Hatch. At 21 days after the egg is laid, the little chick goes to work. It has a hardened patch on its little bill called an egg tooth. Bracing itself against the interior of its shell with a wing, it begins chipping away at the inside of the shell. It uses its feet to turn itself so that it can chip all the way around, until the shell pops open.

And that's what the egg was all about all along. It was always meant to tell a story of a brand new life breaking out of its shell.

Fulfilling God's Law:

Jesus said that He didn't come to abolish God's Law, but to *fulfill* it. He didn't come to smash the egg shell. He came to hatch the chick. He came to bring God's Story to its rightful conclusion. He came to rescue us from the inside out.

He isn't saying that you and I have to somehow try to keep rules that are even more demanding than before. He is saying that He has come to live

inside us and give us His new life. We aren't called to "hatch" a new version of ourselves. We are challenged to let Jesus birth us brand new.

Getting Back on Track:

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And that means giving Him every opportunity to transform and heal us. It means taking ownership of our bad behaviors and being willing to be reconciled to an adversary. It means not waiting for the right moment – a moment that will never come. It means making today, right now, the time that we allow God to do a new thing in us and in our relationships.

God isn't interested in having a whole bunch people trapped inside shells of rules and regulations, as important as they are. His ultimate goal is that we become like Him, changed on the inside, and able to go out with His life and change our world.

But if it's going to happen, it will always start in our hearts. It will be the true mark of our devotion to God Himself, and we will keep short accounts.

So, what relationship does God want to transform in your life today?