Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, there lived a man and woman. And they were married. And in the course of time, the wife gave birth to a baby son. And the husband and wife were overjoyed at this child! And some time later, the wife gave birth to another son. So, they were *doubly* overjoyed! But some years later, the older son murdered his brother in cold blood. Does that story sound familiar to any of you? It should. It is the story of Cain’s murder of Abel.

And in one way, it **shocks and stuns me every time I read it**. For in Genesis 1 we read that God created the man and woman as *living* beings. He made them, and all human beings, *in His image*. And before the Fall, there was only life; no death. And if the Fall had not happened, they would have eaten from the Tree of Life and been translated into eternal life. BUT, God did warn Adam that if he ate the forbidden fruit, he would die. Implication? Death is *really* terrible and awful and evil. It is the worst thing that can happen.

Well, you know what happened next: They ate the fruit and they expected to die. And God came to them and told them that they would die but He also promised eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

But from that moment on, the specter of death haunted every moment of life. And you and I can go short or long periods without thinking about death, but sooner or later, something reminds us that we will die.

But knowing how wonderful and precious life is, and how awful death is, you would think that human beings would not kill each other. Right? But what is the first human action that the Bible records after the Fall? Cain murders his own brother!

And we will come back to this when we return to Genesis 4, but **the first poem or song** in the Bible is Lamech boastfully telling his wives, “*I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me*.”

And in Genesis 6 we are told that the “*earth was filled with violence,*” which is why God brought the flood of Noah’s day. So, murder was common.

And so, after the flood, God said to Noah, “*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in His own image*.”

And later, in the 10 Commandments, God said, very simply, “*You shall not murder*.”

And so, because God had finally made it crystal clear that murder was evil and forbidden, since then, no one has ever killed another human being. Is that true? It’s not; is it. Even here in New Zealand, there are around 60-80 homicides every year. But surely you and me are not murderers? We have not physically killed another human being? So, when we stand before God on Judgment Day, surely we **will get a green tick** next to the Sixth Commandment? Kept that one!

Well, it would nice if that were so. But we saw in our earlier reading from **1 John 3** that much more is in view with the sixth commandment than just actual murder. For believers are warned there to “*not be like Cain who … murdered his brother*.” And I think we cans safely assume that the Christians that John wrote were not running around with chainsaws or kitchen knives or Assault rifles!

So, what does the sixth commandment require of us? How does the 6th Commandment help us to not be like Cain? And what is the relationship between the sixth commandment and the gospel?

Well, we are going to keep this very simple. We will begin by just looking at the command and its biblical context, before we look at the command and its biblical application.

So firstly, **the command and its biblical context**.

1. The people of Israel are at Mt. Sinai. They have been rescued from slavery in Egypt and are heading to the Promised Land. And God reminds them of that in the introduction to the law. And this point is of vital importance, as we shall see soon.
2. But the first four commandments **have God primarily in view**, worship God alone, worship Him the right way, use His name carefully and reverently, and observe the Sabbath day – His day – the day He made holy.
3. The last six commandments **have man primarily in view**. The first of these is the commandment focused on authority within human society. It established the basis upon which society must function; that of superiors and inferiors; those who must be obeyed and those who must obey; those who make laws and those who must keep them. So, honouring and obeying those in authority is of fundamental importance to the right functioning of society.
4. But the next commandment is about the value of life: “*You shall not murder*.” Also of fundamental importance to the right functioning of society is respect for life. And as we saw earlier, this is because we human beings are made in the image of God.
5. Now, let’s first think about this **in terms of the people of Israel**. As I said a moment ago, the people of Israel had just been rescued from slavery in Egypt. But this was not just about being owned by others. Do you boys and girls remember the story of Moses’birth? He was put in a little basket on the Nile river, where he was found by Pharaoh’s daughter. And that sounds cute, but do you remember why Moses’ mother did this? Because Pharaoh had ordered the killing of every new-born boy in Israel. According to Pharoah, the Israelites were breeding too fast and threatening to overwhelm Egypt. So, he had ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill every new born male baby. And what would that mean in 5-60 years time? No more Israel! And so, by bringing His people out from Egypt, God made life itself a visible sign of His grace. Their redemption secured their lives. Thus, when God said to His people, “*You shall not murder*,” He was reminding them that they owed their lives to His grace. Hence, if they took the life of another, they were no different than the Egyptians and were attacking the very grace of God.
6. Now, you and I have not been rescued from Egypt. Our lives are not threatened as theirs were. That might change one day, but that is not how it is now. And so, we must take a step further back than the situation of Israel to the sorts of things we saw earlier in Genesis. The command is “*You shall not murder*.”
   1. And the first thing to note is that **this command has** **human life in view**. It’s not talking about animals and plants, which is an increasingly popular view today. We have seen this in our recent Genesis sermons, God initially gave humans plants and fruit to eat, and later the flesh of animals. And I mention this because there are those in our world today who say that eating animals is murder. It is not.
      1. Perhaps it will help us to think of it this way:
         1. Think of a famous statue like Michelangelo’s statue of David, or a famous painting like Da Vinci’s Mona Lisa. Think of the time and effort that has gone into creating that statue or that painting, and its value.
         2. And are you able to go up to that statue or painting and touch it or chisel it or draw on it or slice it? No, you are not! If you go to any gallery where such valuable art is on display, you will find that it is protected by lasers and shields and safety glass and all sorts of security systems. Such art works are simply too valuable to allow them to be damaged.
         3. Well, God’s creation masterpiece is man! And because He created man in His image, God has put in place a security system to protect the masterpiece of His creation. And that security system is Exodus 20:13: “*You shall not murder*.””
      2. Now, that d**oes not mean that we can treat animals and birds and trees and plants, however we like**.
         1. For example, the fourth commandment says, “*Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. On [the Sabbath day], you shall not work* *nor your animals*.” And **Proverbs 12:10** says, “*A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal*.”” So, we must not be cruel to animals.
         2. And in **Deuteronomy 20:19**, God warned His people, in times of war, not to needlessly cut down trees. So, caring for ‘the environment’ is a godly thing to do also.
         3. But God did give us animals and trees and plants to use for food and building. We must not put them on the same level as human life.
   2. And so, most simply, the sixth commandment forbids us from *taking* human life and requires us to *protect* human life.

This then is the **context** of the sixth commandment. But next we must also consider the **application** of the sixth commandment; our second point.

1. This commandment in the King James Version says, “*Thou shalt not kill*.” Modern Bible versions, however, have it as “*You shall not murder*.” And the choice of the word murder is an improvement on the choice of the word kill, as far as the original language is concerned.
   1. And that is because the Bible explicitly defends the right to **kill an intruder**, at night, in self-defence. It also defends the right of a nation to undertake **a just war**, which will inevitably involve killing. And the Bible also calls on the government to **kill those who commit murder** through capital punishment. So, there are *legitimate* killings, which is why using the word murder is helpful.
   2. But having said that, the commandment is not only concerned with murder or what we call intentional homicide. And we see this elsewhere in God’s law. Suicide, also, is in view here. As is manslaughter, whether voluntary or involuntary. And it even includes accidental death. And we don’t have time today to go into the subtleties of these different types of killing, but the point is that God is concerned with ***all*** unlawful killing. He is so concerned about those He has created in His image, He wants anything and everything to be done to preserve life, and He wants every death that occurs by the will of man, whether intentional or unintentional, to be investigated and judged to establish the level of guilt.
      1. And this is why **abortion and euthanasia** are violations of the sixth commandment – they end the life of those made in God’s image. A ‘woman’s right to choose’ or the circumstances of the conception or the health or otherwise of the baby simply do not enter the equation – “*You shall not murder*.”
      2. **Workplace deaths, car accidents, drownings** – all these need to be carefully investigated to assess culpability. And this principle is also why health and safety laws are a good thing, in principle. We should care about protecting people from dying.
      3. And this could be a profitable lecture all in itself, but our culture is increasingly obsessed with ‘**sports’ like UFC and MMA, and ‘extreme sports’ like base-jumping, spelunking, bungy jumping, and launching your bike off the side of a mountain**. And we could easily add driving really fast on public roads to this list. For the fact is that “But I enjoy watching these things or doing these things” does not make them OK. And trotting out the “studies have shown that more people have died while brushing their teeth in the bathroom than while engaged in sports like these doesn’t finish the argument, either. Because while you must brush your teeth, you do not have to jump off a bridge with a rubber band tied around your legs. So, think very hard about your motivations, brothers and sisters. Is this ego? Is this purely an adrenaline rush? Is this just the thrill of cheating death? Or is this unnecessary recklessness that I should avoid, for the sake of honouring the Lord and my witness to others?
2. I said at the beginning of the sermon that the story of Cain and Abel shocks and stuns me every time I read it. And it should. But as we draw to a close, if we also take into account what the Lord Jesus said about the sixth commandment, and how His words are reflected elsewhere in the New Testament, and what John said about the sixth commandment in our 1 John passage, then the story of Cain and Abel is **not shocking at all**.
   1. For in His commentary on the sixth commandment, **Jesus** said, “*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*.””
   2. And while Paul began his ‘sin list’ in **Galatians 5** with sexual sins, he gave far more attention to: “*Hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy*.”
   3. And **John** said, “*Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him*.”
      1. Boys and girls, have you hated your blood brother or sister? You know, when they pinch your stuff, again, and they broke it? Or they hit you or pushed you?
      2. Drivers, by which I mostly mean men, have you hated another driver or called him or her a fool?
      3. Husbands and wives – I am sure you love each other, but has there been hatred or resentment or bitterness toward your spouse? Is there, right now, perhaps?
      4. Employees – have you hated your boss? Employers, have you ever thought of your staff as utter fools?
   4. **James 3:6-9** says, “*And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness … It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in [His image]*.” Is there any one here who has cursed another human being? It’s all of us, isn’t it.
   5. And shall I read the positive requirement of the sixth commandment, as we find it in **1 Corinthians 13**? “*Love is patient, and kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails*.” How are you going with that, friends?” For, whenever we fail to love in this way, perfectly, we break the sixth commandment.
   6. And this is why, if we are honest, the story of Cain and Abel is not shocking at all, is it. In fact, it is, for most or all of us, There, but for the grace of God, go I!

And that, congregation, is why to fully understand the preciousness of human life, we need to switch our eyes away from Mt. Sinai and the law to Mt. Calvary and the gospel. For all that the law can do is reveal how miserably and frequently we break the Sixth Commandment. It shows how cheap life is in our culture. It shows how quickly we murder others by our thoughts, words, or deeds.

But at Mt. Calvary, the only life that never murdered, that never hated, that never flew into a rage, that always loved, perfectly, was murdered because of your sins and mine.

For people like us who spill human blood, so easily, the blood of Jesus Christ was spilled. And His blood was spilled so that those who confess sins against the sixth commandment may have forgiveness and *eternal* life!

As one commentator so beautifully puts it, at Calvary God says to you, ‘Here, give me your life, such as it is, and I will give you mine! Give me your sin, and I will give you my Son! Give me your hate, and I will give you my love!’”

So, let us be those who confess our sins against the sixth commandment, who resolve to “not be like Cain,” and instead be those who protect life, who avoid hatred, and who strive to love our neighbours, all the while trusting entirely and only in the obedience and sacrifice of Christ. Amen