

Love does not Envy: Matthew 20v1-16

1. Prologue

- The Oxford English dictionary describes envy as '*a feeling of discontented or resentful longing aroused by another's better fortune*' but I suppose we all knew that really because I think I can say with some degree of certainty that all of us at some time or other have experienced feelings of envy so we each know a fair bit about it! Envy is a very strong emotion. It is more than just jealousy. When we are jealous we want what others have but when we are envious we not only want what others have but we, very often, want to have what they have but want them to lose what they have. It is a very wicked and destructive emotion indeed.

2. Envy in the Old Testament

- Let me give you some biblical examples just to act as a reminder. The Bible tells us that the very first murder in the Bible resulted from the sin of envy when Cain killed Abel. We are told in Genesis 26 that Isaac became very prosperous with many flocks and herds and that the Philistines grew so envious that they came and stopped up all the wells with earth. We are told in Genesis 37 that Israel loved Joseph more than all his children because he was the son of his old age. You remember he made for him the coat of many colours or the coat with long sleeves. Because of this his brothers grew to hate him and would not speak peaceably to him. We are told in 1 Samuel 18v7-9 that Saul became envious of David. The people said ***Saul has slain his thousands but David his ten thousands.*** This caused great animosity between them because Saul feared that he would lose the kingdom to David. In Daniel 6v3-4 we are told that Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and the satraps because an excellent spirit was upon him and that the king thought of setting him over the whole realm. This, we are told, caused the governors and the satraps to plot against him.
- And let us not forget that this whole business of envy is directly related to the tenth commandment. ***You shall not covet....*** for this is when a person has a great desire for something belonging to another person and why do they want that thing? They want it because of envy. Therefore it becomes pretty obvious that, in fact envy, is the threshold that you have to cross, in breaking the tenth commandment. Therefore, if you do not want to break that commandment it becomes pretty clear that envy is something that you need to get under control and deal with.

3. Envy in the New Testament

- What about the New Testament? Well think about the death of Jesus. What do we read in Mark 15v9-11? We read this.... ***Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, ¹⁰ knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.*** The Gospel writer tells it very plainly - the chief priest handed Jesus over to Pilate out of envy. They did not like his popularity and any lessening of their influence that that might mean.
- In the Acts of the Apostles we read too that Paul got into trouble resulting from envy whilst in the city of Antioch. This is what it says ***On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.*** So envy even had its part to play in preventing the spread of the Gospel! Envy and jealousy, because the two are closely related, have been the cause of so much wrong and evil in the world. It is a very serious business. Listen to what Paul writes to the Galatians... ***The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*** Gal 5v19

4. Envy in Today's World

5. Yet we live in a materialistic world today that is almost founded upon the idea of envy. Modern advertising is not just a matter of informing people of the product that is available but very often encouraging feelings of desire and envy, in other words lighting the fire of desire deep within the individual such that they want it and they want it now! Worst of all a fair proportion of this advertising is directed towards our children and young people and comes not just on television but via the internet as well.
- It is interesting that if you do a search on Google of the word 'envy' you come up with some interesting links. e.g. Pay packet envy, clothing envy, the politics of envy, The envy experience a company name ***You deserve your reward so sit back, relax and take time to pick an experience that will turn your friends and family green with ENVY. ...;*** automobile envy, Create Envy - the name of an advertising company; Envy Aviation - they make luxury aircraft, bridal package envy, pregnancy envy, bathroom envy, nail envy, Gucci envy, food envy, lots of nightclubs called 'Envy'; the envy of other personality types; class envy, and so we go on.
 - Rick Warren draws attention to some of the problems caused by envy and it is quite a list: Adultery, bitterness, complaining, exaggeration, gossip, hypocrisy, insecurity, manipulating, power hungry, rude, sarcastic, spiteful, stingy, stubborn, unforgiving, ungrateful, unkind, vain. he also reminds us of Proverbs 14v30 ***A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.*** Envy can be like an insidious disease that rots us away from our inside.
 - The fact is that jealousy and envy is an insidious thing and we can find ourselves envying almost anyone or anything. Have you ever found yourself secretly envying someone who is engaged in sinful activity? Well Psalm 37v1 says this *PS 37:1 Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong;*

6. The Five Antidotes to Envy

- Matthew Chapter 20 and the story of the workers in the field is a well known New Testament story but one that often provokes a lot of discussion. It focuses on a landowner who contracted five groups of workers to work on his land for a day. He contracts them to work at different times of day and for different lengths of time. At the end of the day he decides to pay them all the same and, what a surprise, some of the workers begin to protest at what they perceive to be an unfairness in the way they are being paid - although they all got what they had been contracted for.
- Rick Warren brings five truths from this passage, so let's examine them....

(1) **Don't Compare** The men who protest do so out of envy and one of the roots of that envy is the need we have to compare ourselves with others. The Bible tells us don't keep comparing yourself - your looks, your intelligence, your salary, your car, your home, your children. Realise that you are unique and realise that if you go on comparing it can only lead to one of two sins - either pride or envy!

One way to avoid this kind of envy is to get to know people really well - to know their whole story. Behind our facades all of us have our stories to tell and what sometimes is outward happiness can often hide many problems and difficulties. When you know someone really well you love to see them prosper and do well.

(2) **Start Enjoying** when you see God blessing. This is the exact opposite of what these workers did. **Learn** to rejoice when others rejoice. **Learn** to be glad when others are blessed. **Learn** not to resent the success that others have. **Remember** that God has plenty of blessing to go around. Take particular care when someone has success in an area where you feel that you have a measure of success. Doctors can envy other doctors, musicians can envy other musicians. Evangelists can even envy the success of other evangelists! Envy is a choice - make the right choice!

(3) **Be Grateful for what you have.** Don't focus on what you didn't have and what didn't happen - focus on what you do have and did happen. Much envy is based upon a myth -

more makes me happier. Envy is such a negative emotion. It is not about not having goals in life. To have aims and goals are good and positive things. Envy is when we set those aims and goals to better ourselves over the achievements of someone else. If you are not grateful you will be resentful and that's very negative. Be grateful to God for all that you have received!

(4) **Learn to Trust God when life seems unfair.** The bottom line is that when you are envious you are in a battle with God and doubting God's goodness in your life. When you are envious you are not putting God first in your life and worse, you are doubting that God has your best interests at heart! You are in danger of forgetting just how much God loves you! If envy is the fever then doubting God is the infection. Note verse 12 ***These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day'. Can you hear the envy in that!***

(5) **Keep focused on God's Plan for your Life** Don't get distracted by what is going on in other people's lives. Centre on what God's will is for your life. **Get a Life!** Quit feeling sorry for yourself and get on with your life. Don't get stuck in the past or in the present because envy pulls you down and pulls you back. It can harm relationships because our envy often relates to people in the past and then festers like a cancer eating in to our very soul. You have a race to run with your life don't let envy hold you back!

Jesus concludes his story with a shocking statement. Matthew 20v16 says, ***So the last will be first, and the first will be last.*** He is talking about heaven here folks! ***Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant!*** When it comes to heaven, the tables will be turned upside down. The line-up in heaven is not the wealthy, the famous, the intelligent, the beautiful, and all those other things we envy. At the head of the queue will be those with a humble and contrite spirit!

7. The Way Forward

- A few final thoughts. (1) Contentment is not a natural state of mind, it is something that has to be learnt. For the Christian it is as we focus away from the physical and on to the spiritual that we can find contentment (2) The most powerful antidote to envy is love. ***Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud.*** (3) The six R's of an envy free life are: **Remind** yourself of the scriptures; **Resist** comparing yourself to others; **Recognise** your uniqueness; **Rejoice** in what you have; **Respond** to others in love; **Refocus** your mind on pleasing the creator

Thoughts and Reflections

1. If you were present for the service what were your immediate reactions to what you heard?
2. Can you share any examples of where envy has been a real problem either to yourself or to someone else?
3. What is the root of envy and why is it such a dangerous emotion?
4. Look in more detail at one or two of the OT or NT examples where envy has been involved in the story. What do you learn?
5. In a society where advertising encourages so much envy what can we do to deal with this insidious problem?
6. How useful / practical are Rick Warren's five antidotes or the six 'R' approach to dealing with the problem?