

c o n t e m p t

S E R I O U S L Y ?

day one - Read MATTHEW 7:17-18

Jesus uses fruit to represent our actions. At the core of every fruit there's a seed. A seed is the most basic form that gives life to fruit. At the core of every action there's an incentive to do what we do or don't do. In order for us to act (or to refrain from action) the incentive must be strong enough. In **MATTHEW 5:21-22**, Jesus tells the crowd that the commandment "You shall not commit murder" is inadequate by itself. He then raises the bar when he says, "...that anyone who is angry with his brother is subject to judgment." This changes everything. After all, the death penalty is a strong incentive (an easy seed to plant), but up to this point the laws (incentives) against simply holding your brother in contempt weren't all that bad. What's Jesus done here? He's given us completely new incentives - the seeds that lead to action. The focus is no longer on rules and laws that govern our actions, but the incentives provoke our hearts to store contempt or live above it. We move our attention from what NOT to do, to an inward heart-change which manifests itself by living differently. In this teaching, Jesus truly gets to the heart of our actions, and forces us to recognize and deal with contempt in our own lives. To become a better person, a good person from whom good things naturally flow, take a look at the seeds in your heart.

TODAY: Try to pay special attention to contempt you see in our culture, the people you meet and your own words, attitudes and actions.

day two

How do you define contempt? Imagine defining and explaining it to a child or someone unfamiliar with the word. Generally, we'd use strong, intensely emotional words which describe attitudes and emotions we don't expect to find within our own hearts. In the weekend message, Paul defined contempt as "a self-certain, self-superior disdain for anything or anyone we consider beneath us and therefore worthy of disrespect, criticism, scorn, ridicule or dismissal." A dictionary further defines contempt as "disapproval tinged with disgust; to feel that a person or thing is beneath one's dignity and unworthy of one's notice, respect, or concern." Look at the words used in both definitions. Where is it in our world today? Middle Eastern conflicts? What about current political campaigns? TV? Movies? Think about reality TV, comedy, email jokes and stories. Where do you see self-certain people ridiculing others or arrogantly dismissing what others say or do? Treating others rudely or with disrespect? Disregarding others? Many of our favorite TV characters are full of contempt, filling each episode with one put-down or cynical attitude after another, but we love 'em - and perhaps we're grateful we aren't that bad! Maybe we're drawn in because we see something obvious in the characters that we hide in ourselves. We tend to love the cynical, arrogant, witty hero. Do you agree that we're part of a culture drowning in contempt? As you're on **contempt watch** this week, be mindful of the many disguises of contempt - the "sanitized" versions we've learned to call by other names: sarcasm, rudeness, disregarding someone, disrespectful or mocking words. These are just a few of the expressions of contempt we've grown used to in our world. Read and consider what **PSALMS 1:1C** teaches us about wisdom, worship and living a blessed day.

day three

As we begin to see contempt in a new light and begin to recognize it in our own lives, do we understand the danger of holding contempt in our hearts?

Read **MATTHEW 5:22, MATTHEW 7:17-19, AND MATTHEW 15:18-20A**.

According to this weekend's message, every human evil and human pain finds its source - it's genesis - in contempt. When contempt takes root, what happens in a marriage? In communities? In our schools and work places? What about when the law is held in contempt? Ultimately contempt undermines all of Jesus' ethical teachings and creates a small, bitter, isolated heart fit only for hell.

Where are you beginning to notice contempt in our world and in your own heart?

Who could you share your findings with this week? What does a heart fit for heaven look like? A heart above contempt. Think about the choices you make; the words you speak. Which kind of heart are they feeding? Are you storing good or evil? Ask God to show you areas in your life where contempt is at work. Pray your eyes will be opened to the true dangers of contempt.

day four

The symptoms are clear when you have the flu: achiness, fever, lack of energy, maybe an upset stomach. Treating symptoms alone won't make the virus go away, and you're still contagious a few days after the symptoms are gone. But you won't recognize the flu without the symptoms. In the same way, we can't remove contempt unless we learn to recognize its symptoms in our lives. The path to understanding how much contempt we hold is understanding our feelings or lack of feelings toward another person, behavior, or idea. It can be seen in the non-verbal (sneer, rolling our eyes) as well as the verbal. Look at the list of symptoms in this weekend's message outline. Are you experiencing any of these symptoms? Are you suffering from contempt? If you're experiencing one or all of these symptoms, refer to **1 CORINTHIANS 13:11**. When you were sick, you acted sick. Now that you're healed, start acting like it. Pray that God will help you recognize symptoms of contempt in your life and that you'd begin to take steps to be healed from it.

day five

This has been a week of hard spiritual work. If you're doing today's devotional, good job. You're storing up good things in your heart through this new behavior. As it becomes a pattern, it will be invaluable for your journey to become a better person. A good person from whom good things naturally flow. We've begun a journey of awareness, reflection, confession and rejection of the contempt that kills us. When our hearts are sensitive to contempt, we begin to see what contempt does. When we recognize the symptoms, we begin to see we're really drowning in a culture of contempt. **BE AWARE** of what's going on inside and around us; **REFLECT** on contempt's impact on our lives; **CONFESS** to God that we've established it in our hearts; and **MAKE A CONSCIOUS CHOICE** to continually reject contempt as a pattern for life. **TODAY:** As you become aware of contempt, whisper a prayer to God - confessing the temptation to store contempt in your heart. Ask God to give you wisdom to reject contempt and choose love.