

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

A Workbook for Adults

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Lesson 1

Introduction

This sermon is, by far, the most identifiable collection of sayings the world knows as Jesus' Matthew prefaces its introduction with the reminder that Jesus had been proclaiming the "good news of the kingdom" (4:23). Indeed, this sermon was a definitive outlay of the message of the kingdom of good news that Jesus knew He had come to bring – and the life to which He would call His people to live. These words were first called "the Lord's Sermon on the Mount" by Augustine (Stott, 24) and the description stuck. "It seems certain that no other speech ever delivered has so influenced man as has this sermon on the mount" (Whiteside, 117).

The sermon, though it is in many ways and easily identifiable ethical and moral treatise, is clearly the least understood and obeyed of any of Christ's teachings. He wants disciples to forgive and not hold grudges. He wants disciples to not showcase their righteousness for all to see. I cannot think of two more clear ways Christendom has shown we do not follow Him like we should.

Still, just as the Cross and the Resurrection are the heart of the gospel (c.f. 1Corinthians 15:1-3), this Sermon is, in reality, the central core of His Kingdom message. Jesus preached "the Kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17) so that people should repent and practice the righteousness of the Kingdom (5:20; 6:1). This context where Matthew placed the sermon helps us better understand the sermon's message.

So, what will His disciples look like in comparison to the world? Different (6:7). In comparison to the Jewish religious establishment? Different (6:2,5,16). In fact, He wants disciples to be and do something so entirely different that it is an "Unless your righteousness surpasses" different. Without it, we will "not enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20).

The Setting of the Sermon | Since the fourth century, the "Mountain" traditionally associated with this sermon of Jesus, the Mount of the Beatitudes, is a hill just outside Capernaum. If so, its smiling landscapes and grassy slopes are a welcome contrast to Mount Horeb (Sinai) where Moses delivered the Law. Plus, the bowl-shaped Lake of Gennesaret would have created a natural amplification that would have helped listeners to hear the strong voice in Jesus. He saw "the multitudes" and went "up" the mountain and "sat down," a common teaching posture for Rabbis of the time (Matthew 5:1). And as a result of His teaching, "the multitudes were amazed" because He taught with "authority" (7:28-29).

The Authenticity of the Sermon | There seems to be a parallel of material in Matthew's "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5-7) and Luke's "Sermon on the Plain" (Luke 6:17-49). While there is much similarity to place the sermon on "level place" (Luke 6:17) on the hillside (Matthew 5:1), it is equally believable that Jesus repeated the content of the "Sermon on the Mount" on another day "at a level place." Further, there is unique material in each account which suggests that the sermon(s) were delivered at two different instances. Whatever the case, Matthew and Luke recorded these to be understood as a sermon of Jesus in a precise historical and geographical location.

The Intent of the Sermon | Sometimes the sermon is presented as a contrast between the ethics of the Old and New Testaments. Some say that the Sermon is exclusively the gospel of the NEW BETTER covenant of moral law of Jesus in contrast to the OLD INSUFFICIENT covenant of Moses. In several places in the New Testament, a definable distinction between the Old and New Covenants clearly exists (Hebrews 8:13; 9:15; 10:9 with 2Corinthians 3:7-11). But in the Sermon, Jesus is not contrasting God's Old Law with Jesus' New Law. The very basis of the "New Law" is found in the "Old Law": Love God with all of your heart, soul and mind, and your neighbor as yourself (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). Further, Jesus tells us that what He is doing is contrasting what "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times" (5:21). Or as the NEB says, "You have learned that our forefathers were told..." And when we consider the last contrast (5:43) where Jesus said, "what you have heard" about "love your neighbor" and "hate your enemy," we acknowledge that the first IS a command of Mosaic Law – but the latter is NOT. The Old Testament Law never commanded Israel to hate their enemies. Rather, Rabbis omitted "as yourself," the part of the command that pitches the standard extremely high, and then added the "hate your enemy" to exclude from "neighbors" anyone they wanted to exclude. This blatant mishandling of God's word was nothing more than specious rationalization (c.f. Leviticus 19:17-18, see also Exodus 23:4-5; Deuteronomy 22:1-4; Proverbs 25:21). They would have reasoned that God wanted them to hate who they hated. The contrast(s) Jesus makes is between what the religious teachers taught the people that God said in contrast to what God had really said. The righteousness of God had gotten lost in the "interpretation" of the Pharisees (c.f. Mark 7:1-23). And now that the King was here, He would explain Him – and His will for His people.

The Morality of Jesus' Demands | Another observation worth noting is that the contrasts of chapter five are nothing uniquely Jewish nor are they about "Jewish" laws, per se. Instead, they describe the morality and piety consistent with God's nature that He would demand from any creature made in His image; but particularly from the people who claim to be His. Murder is a sin for any person (Matthew 5:21-26; Romans 1:29). Hate is a sin for any person (5:43-48; Romans 1:30-31), Personal Vengeance (5:38-42; Romans 1:31). Dishonesty and Covenant Breaking (5:33-37; Romans 1:29). Adultery (5:27-32; Romans 1:29). All of these displease God – no matter who does it – in or out of covenant with God (c.f. Romans 1).

So, as we read the Sermon, we should appreciate that what God wants morally and ethically from the Citizen of the Kingdom is what He wants from all His image bearers. Otherwise, murder, adultery, divorce, false vows, vengeance, and hate are acceptable to God for the non-Christian but unacceptable for the Christian. Jesus shows here, I believe, that none of them are acceptable to God from anyone.

Finally, be impressed with the Preacher. The audience was amazed at His authority. He did so, of course, because He was the Son of God (Matthew 28:19). But the authority with which He spoke was because he spoke the Truth as God. Truth has inherent power. Truth frees us from the shackles of human tradition and human ignorance (John 8:32). That powerful Truth is what Jesus spoke. For us, truth makes us confident and certain if we are willing to speak it. Jesus spoke with authority because He was the authority, the Truth (John 14:6).

Below is an outline of the sermon that we will follow in class.

1. Introduction: The Character of Citizens (5:1-16)
 - a. Eight Traits (5:1-12)
 - b. Salt of the Earth (5:13)
 - c. Light of the World (5:14-16)
2. Main Body of the Sermon: The Greater Righteousness of this Kingdom (5:17-7:12)
 - a. Righteousness and the Law (5:17-48).
 - i. First, Jesus Fulfills Law (5:17-20)
 - ii. Six Ways Righteousness is Fulfilled (5:21-47)
 - iii. Objective: Be like God (5:48)
 - b. Righteousness and Piety (6:1-18)
 - i. The True Reward of this Righteousness versus the Wrong (6:1)
 - ii. The True Devotion of the Disciple (6:2-18)
 1. Charity (6:2-4)
 2. Prayer (6:5-15)
 3. Fasting (6:16-18)
 - iii. The True Treasure of Life (6:19-34)*** (A bridge to the next section).
 - c. Righteousness and All Relationships (7:1-7:12)
 - i. God and Money (6:19-34)***
 1. Store treasure in Heaven (19-21)
 2. The Illustration of the Eyes (22-23)
 3. The Illustration of the Two Masters (24)
 4. The Promise of a worry-free life (25-34)
 - ii. God and Your Neighbor (7:1-11)
 1. Do Not Judge (1)
 2. Don't Seek the Splinter (2-5)
 3. Don't Waste the Pearls (6)
 4. Don't Forget to Ask, to Seek and to Knock (7-11)
 5. God and the Golden Rule (7:12)
connects us to the fulfillment of the Law in Jesus.
3. Conclusion: The Choice (7:13-27).
 - a. The Two Paths (7:13-14).
 - b. The Two Harvests (7:15-23)
 - i. False teachers and their deception as wolves (15).
 - ii. False teachers and their fruit (16-20)
 - iii. Future Judgments (21-23)
 - c. The Two Foundations (7:24-27).

Reading Assignment for Lesson 2: Matthew 5:1-11

Lesson 2

The Character of Citizens: Eight Traits (5:1-12)

The Sermon on the Mount is more than a general discourse on the happy life or good ethics – it is a discourse on the true call to discipleship in the kingdom. And the mark has been set high: “to be like God” (5:48). Jesus’ call to discipleship is a high calling, a nearly insurmountable task, and is truly antithetical to legalistic living because disciples who know the kingdom know and have personalized the grace they find therein. The Sermon Matthew records introduces the King in all His authority (c.f. 7:28-29) that the wider audience sees – but the words Jesus addressed were not just for anyone – but for disciples (5:1-2). The antecedent of “them” was disciples.

Also, as an addendum to the introduction, there are five times that Matthew will say “When Jesus had finished saying these things” (7:28), “finished instructing” (11:1), “finished these parables” (13:53), “finished these saying” (19:1), “finished all these sayings” (26:1). This seems to suggest that Matthew has chosen five of Jesus’ discourses for the body of this gospel.

Jesus begins the first discourse with a pithy picture of eight (or nine if you count the double picture of verse 6, or 9 or 10 if you consider vv 11-12 as independent ideas instead of explanations of v 10) depictions of what every Citizen in His kingdom is supposed to look like. These characteristics describe the balanced Christian. They are not eight diverse types of Christians but rather they are eight qualities every Christian must have like purity of heart and poverty of spirit.

The series of eight qualities begin with “Blessed are . . .” From that term we get the common rendering, “Beatitudes.” The word used *makarios* can and does mean “happy.” A few translate it to say, “How happy are...” Certainly, living this way will bring good mental health because truthfully, God knows what is best for us and knows how happiness can be found by His creatures. However, it also might connote a psychologically, emotive idea rather than the relative idea that Jesus is driving throughout the sermon. Hence, it is not the subjective “happiness” that Jesus has in mind here but rather, He is declaring what God thinks of them (I.e., Blessed) when they are pursuing these kingdom qualities. It is not about what they make feel (I.e., happy) but about what they know (“blessed”). It is not a state of “heart” but of “mind.” The blessing commends the hearer to strive for these characteristics because “*theirs is the kingdom of heaven,*” “*they will be comforted,*” and “*they will see God.*” These are not *prescriptions* to happiness, but *prerequisites* to blessings with a here (5:3,10) and then (5:8,11) application.

- 1 **When he saw the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.**
- 2 **Then he began to teach them, saying:**
- 3 **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.**
- 4 **Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**
- 5 **Blessed are the humble, for they will inherit the earth.**
- 6 **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.**
- 7 **Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.**
- 8 **Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**
- 9 **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.**
- 10 **Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.**
- 11 **You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me.**
- 12 **Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (CSB)**

The Poor. The idea of poverty intended is the man who is poor in the sense of being needy. “But the word frequently denotes the poor man who is oppressed by the rich and powerful. The word then attracts to itself the sense of poor, pious, religious people who are oppressed by the ungodly” (Willoughby, ICC, Logos). Just as the Old Testament had promised His people, God will not forget them (Psa 9:13) and will deliver them (34:10) because He is compassionate (Isa 49:13). Yet they are poor “in spirit.” The phrase has a long history in the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms, and refers to those who have confidence only in God, ground down as they are by longstanding social and political distress. So, before this God of protection and compassion, disciples come with a bankrupt heart that has been emptied by the world and foes of righteousness. As Calvin wrote: ‘He only who is reduced to nothing in himself, and relies on the mercy of God, is poor in spirit.’ (Stott, *The Bible Speaks Today* series, Logos). And **the kingdom of heaven is theirs.** This is the way for them because when it comes, it will be theirs.

The mournful. Stott says, “One might almost translate this second beatitude ‘Happy are the unhappy’ in order to draw attention to the startling paradox it contains” (ibid), For they have seen the depth of the world’s suffering and of their own sin, and their hearts have been broken by it. “When that is true of us, we are wide open for the comfort that God longs to give. Had not Jesus come ‘to bind up the broken-hearted’ (Is. 61:1)” where would we be? (Green, IVP, Logos). **And they will be comforted.** The amazing paradox is a promised absolution of the mourning sinner – not the conquering sinner. And it was the Messiah-King who was to bring this comfort and ‘bind up the brokenhearted (Isa 61:1; 40:1). Citizens will know this comfort.

The humble. Though translated as “meek,” the word means ‘gentle,’ ‘humble,’ ‘considerate,’ ‘courteous,’ and connects to self-control. Meekness is not weakness – as often said. Still, “linguistically speaking, the NEB is quite correct to refer in this beatitude to ‘those of a gentle spirit’... I believe Dr Lloyd-Jones is right to emphasize that this meekness denotes a humble and gentle attitude to others which is determined by a true estimate of ourselves” (Stott, TBST, Logos). These ‘meek’ people, Jesus added, **‘will inherit the earth.’** In power structures of men, we would expect the opposite. They experienced presently in the deadly arm of Rome. So, one would think that ‘meek’ people get nowhere because everybody ignores and tramples them underfoot. Would it not be the tough and overbearing who always wins? If Israel had to fight for their inheritance of the promised land, why would new Israel not? Because these citizens enter the kingdom not on might but on meekness which their King manifested for their own redemption.

The hungry. “He has filled the hungry with good things” was the Messiah’s Anthem in Mary’s song “and “He has sent the rich away empty” (Luke 1:53). Their hunger (and thirst) will be satisfied by God. They will not be like pagans, engrossed in the pursuit of possessions, but will ‘seek first’ God’s kingdom and righteousness. This righteousness could include the “legal” righteousness, or justification leading to a right relationship with God. It could be the “moral” righteousness, the character and conduct that pleases God. Or it could include social righteousness, because disciples are called to be different and care like God. Martin Luther expressed it this way: “The command to you is not to crawl into a corner or into the desert, but to run out, if that is where you have been, and to offer your hands and your feet and your whole body, and to wager everything you have and can do.’ What is required, he goes on, is ‘a hunger and thirst for righteousness that can never be curbed, stopped, or sated, one that looks for nothing and cares for nothing except the accomplishment and maintenance of the right, despising everything that hinders this end. If you cannot make the world completely pious, then do what you can” (*Luther’s Works*, vol 21, 27). But **they will be filled** because what they seek for sustenance, only God can provide.

The merciful. ‘Mercy’ is compassion for people in need. And Paul wrote, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort [for] He comforts us in all our affliction” (2Cor 1:3). Lenski distinguished mercy from grace by saying, “The noun *eleos* (mercy) ... always deals with what we see of pain, misery and distress, these results of sin; and *charis* (grace) always deals with the sin and guilt itself. The one extends relief, the other pardon; the one cures, heals, helps, the other cleanses

and reinstates.' (Lenski, *Matthew*, 91). Stott summarized, "For to be meek is to acknowledge to others that we are sinners; to be merciful is to have compassion on others, for they are sinners too" (TBST, Logos). And these "**will receive mercy.**" It might be that He is saying they will receive mercy from God – though they will have already received it. And Jesus will later say that if we do not forgive others, why would we expect our sins to be forgiven (6:14-15). Yet, it seems that mercy springs from the one who is shown mercy so that the blessing is mutual for both.

The pure in heart. 'Pure' means without alloy or untainted. If it is true that humans see only what we are able to see, then if we train ourselves with an open and honest heart to see only the Lord and His will, Jesus says that we will see God in all His untainted beauty in glory. When Jesus says, 'in heart,' it indicates the kind of purity to which He is alluding, just as He alluded earlier to the poverty being not in wealth but 'in spirit.' This emphasis on the inward contrasted with the outward (or ceremonial and physical) would follow with the message of the Kingdom. However, this 'purity of heart' is a single-minded devotion. "Tasker defines the pure in heart as 'the single-minded, who are free from the tyranny of a divided self.' In this case the pure heart is the single heart and prepares the way for the 'single eye' which Jesus mentions in the next chapter" (Stott, *ibid*). So, the pure in heart are '*the utterly sincere*' (JBP). Their whole life, public and private, is transparent before God and men. And only the pure in heart **will see God**. They see Him now with the eye of faith and they will see His glory in the hereafter.

The peacemakers. From purity of heart, Jesus moves to the manifestation of it: peacemaking. A common source of conflict is deception, while sincerity is the solution to reconciliation. Every disciple, according to this beatitude, is meant to be a peacemaker in their communities and places of worship. Though Jesus will later say that he had 'not come to bring peace, but a sword', and 'to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law', so that a man's enemies would be 'those of his own household', the conflict is the gospel – not the disciple. It is clear disciples should never seek conflict or be responsible for it. On the contrary, we are called to actively 'pursue' peace, 'strive for peace with all men,' and so far as it depends on us, we are to 'live peaceably with all" (1Cor 7:15; 1Pet 3:11; Rom 12:18). It is in this pursuit that Jesus says we will be **called sons of God**. However, 'peace' and 'concession' are not synonyms. The peace God made for us did come at "any price" but at "immense price;" the life and blood of his only Son. Though in lesser ways, we will experience peace making a costly enterprise. While unity is still the aim of churches, it cannot be unity at the expense of doctrine. Jesus prayed for the oneness of his people yet He also prayed that they might be kept from evil and in truth. We have no directive from Christ to seek unity without the purity of both His doctrine and His conduct.

The persecuted. However, Jesus says that the peacemaker will be the persecuted. While it was common for prophets (12), Jesus reminds disciples the Kingdom will come with the same challenge. And it may seem strange that Jesus should pass from peacemaking to persecution. While they strive to unite people, others will strive – aggressively – to divide through scornful slander and berating banter. It will not be because of disciples but because of 'righteousness' (10) and, Jesus adds, 'on my account' (11). Persecution is the collision of two irreconcilable world-systems. But Jesus said when this happens, "Rejoice and be glad!" (12). There is to be no retaliation, revenge, self-pity, or sulking. Disciples should rejoice and even 'leap for joy' because "*your reward is great in heaven*" (12). Jesus promised, "**the kingdom of heaven is theirs**" (10).

Review Questions:

1. What does it mean to really be “poor in spirit”?
2. What does it mean to be “gentle” (NASB) or “meek” (KJV)?
3. From whom do you think the merciful receive mercy? How will our treatment of others effect God’s treatment of us? Why?
4. What does it mean to be “pure in heart”?
5. Why would it be so appropriate for “sons of God” to be peacemakers?
6. Why would the world persecute people described in these Beatitudes?
7. How can persecution be a blessing?

Lesson 3

The Character of Citizens: Two More Traits (5:13-16)

In the next verses, 13-16, Jesus uses two metaphors—two word pictures—two parables—to describe why it is important that His disciples should be different and see as different. If you are a follower of Jesus, these two pictures tell us what we're here for. Jesus says we are salt and light.

The Salt. "The world cannot endure without salt" (Sir 39:26). Salt was very common in Jesus' day, but it was not the kind of pure salt we have today. It was mixed with impurities and if it was exposed to moisture for a long time, the salt could leach out, leaving only sand behind—it lost its salty characteristics though technically, sodium chloride doesn't lose its "flavor". What happened is the "salt" became worthless and no longer did what it was supposed to do. You just threw it out on the ground with the rest of the dust. It's no longer real salt; *it's just tasteless trash.*

13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It's no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (CSB)

Lots of us have heard explanations for salt—our job is to make the world taste better or stop it from rotting—but these explanations often conflict with each other. Jesus was talking about salt in relation to the earth, not food. **Salting the earth** was something people did after destroying their enemies, rather than blessing them. Elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus connects salt with fire and with living at peace together (Mark 9:49-50), neither of which seems to fit with the idea of tastiness or preservation.

The reason it's confusing is that salt had a number of purposes in the ancient world. At least five of them are relevant to Jesus's words about his disciples: salt was used for flavoring, preserving, sacrificing, destroying, and fertilizing. Rather than assuming that Jesus's statement is confusing and then debating which particular use of salt he had in mind, it's best to assume he knew what he was doing and that metaphors can function in multiple ways. Followers of Jesus are like salt:

1. **Flavoring.** Salt makes food taste better. This is probably the use of salt that most of us think of, because it's the only one of the five that still applies today. Regardless of whether Jesus's original audience would also have thought of it first—and they may not have—it is a powerful illustration of the way Christians are to serve the world. We're intended to spread throughout the world and enhance it, adding flavor to things that would be bland, drawing out the blessings of whatever is good, and providing a contrast by being distinct and different. When Paul tells us to ensure that our speech is "seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person" (Col. 4:6), this is the kind of thing he has in mind. (see also Mark 9:50).
2. **Preserving.** Salt was the ancient equivalent of refrigeration. If you wanted to stop meat or fish from decaying, you could rub in salt and make it edible for longer. This was the main reason salt was so valuable. Roman soldiers were sometimes paid in salt, which (as an aside) is the origin of our word "salary." Disciples of Jesus, in this sense, are sent into the world to keep it from decay, preserving its goodness and preventing it from becoming corrupted or ruined, which is a helpful thing to bear in mind as we go to work every day.
3. **Sacrificing.** Early in Israel's history, Moses explained how Israel was to offer sacrifices to the Lord: "You shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt" (Lev. 2:13).

Perhaps because it flavored food and kept meat from going bad, salt was a necessary part of all of the Israelites' sacrifices and even represented God's covenant with them. The earth is the altar. Disciples offer themselves in obedient, suffering self-sacrifice, and we become the seasoning on a cosmic sacrifice that makes it well-pleasing to God.

4. **Destroying.** While less appealing, there are more scriptural references to salt being used in judgment or destruction than to any of the other purposes. When Lot's wife turns back to look at the city of Sodom, she is turned into a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:26), a story Jesus refers to when describing the day of his coming (Luke 17:32). Moses warns the Israelites that if they break God's covenant, their land will be "burned out with brimstone and salt, nothing sown and nothing growing, where no plant can sprout" (Deut. 29:23). When Gideon's son Abimelech tries to set himself up as king of Israel, the men of Shechem rebel against him, and he responds by razing the city and sowing it with salt (Judg. 9:45). The psalmist describes God turning "a fruitful land into a salty waste, because of the evil of its inhabitants" (Ps. 107:34). Jesus himself, in one of the fiercest judgment paragraphs in the Gospels, says simply that "everyone will be salted with fire" (Mark 9:49). Salt, in the ancient Near East, was used to express judgment upon evil. There's a sense in which disciples have the same purpose. God scatters salty Christians into the world as a way of judging evil, destroying wickedness, and preventing lust or greed or murder or injustice from taking root. The very existence of the church, preaching and living out the gospel, proclaims judgment against the enemies of God and serves as what Paul calls "a clear sign to them of their destruction" (Phil. 1:28); this may be why Jesus says we are the salt of the earth immediately after describing the persecution we will face if we follow him.
5. **Fertilizing.** Several ancient civilizations used salt as a fertilizer for the soil, and depending on the conditions, it could help the earth retain water, make fields easier to plow, release minerals for plants, kill weeds, protect crops from disease, stimulate growth, and increase yields. The reason this matters is that Jesus specifically describes his people as the salt of the earth, which in a rural, farming culture would have been significant. Disciples are fertilizers. We're meant to be in those places where conditions are challenging and life is hard. We are sent to enrich the soil, kill weeds, protect against disease, and stimulate growth, and as we scatter, life springs up in unexpected places. Barren lands become fruitful. When the people of God are redeemed, as the prophet says, "the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus" (Isa. 35:1).

So, when Jesus said we are the salt of the earth, what did he mean? Did he mean that God will use us for flavoring, preserving, sacrificing, destroying, or fertilizing? **In a word, yes.**

The Light. Just like the first metaphor, Jesus makes His true disciples the subject and the fallen world the setting: "you are the light of the world." Wherever light enters, darkness is automatically dispelled. Paul asks in 2Corinthians 6:14, "what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?" Light and darkness cannot abide together because they are antithetical to one another. The second point of similarity is that we are not only in contrast with the world, we are a marked improvement. A third point that both proverbs have in common is irony. In my opinion, we may work too hard to uncover *the reason for the salt losing* its flavor, etc. The fact is that salt should never lose its flavor, any more than light should lose its light. Salt is salty; light is light. How could it be otherwise? It is ironic, totally unexpected, to find salt without saltiness and light without light. So also is it unthinkable that a follower of Jesus would not glorify God.

Throughout John's Gospel, the "Light of the world" is Jesus. John describes Jesus with these words: "He was the true Light which coming into the world enlightens every man" (John 1:9). Jesus Himself says in John 8:12: "I am the Light of the world." If Jesus is the Light of the world, why does He say in Matthew 5:14: "You are the light of the world"? We can't all be the light of the world, because John is very explicit about saying that John the Baptist "was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of the Light" (John 1:8). The answer is that John was centering on Jesus.

But in the Sermon, Jesus is centering on disciples. He said, “He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life.” The disciple of Jesus has light in himself because he is in Christ, who is the “Light” of the world. You are the light of the world because Christ is in you, and He is Light. Paul adds, “that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15) “for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (2:13).

What would salt and light, common household items, mean as metaphors of the Kingdom calling? Clearly they are needful items. Pliny wrote that nothing was more useful than “salt and sunshine” (*Natural History*, XXXI, 102). The purpose of light is practically self-evident. Walk into an enclosed room or cave and you will know the need for light. It dispels darkness. But is there a large difference in the two metaphors? One writer said this:

Whereas salt is hidden, light is obvious. Salt works secretly, while light works openly. Salt works from within, light from without. Salt is more the indirect influence of the gospel, while light is more its direct communication. Salt works primarily through our living, while light works primarily through what we teach and preach. Salt is largely negative. It can retard corruption, but it cannot change corruption into incorruption. Light is more positive. It not only reveals what is wrong and false but helps produce what is righteous and true. (MacArthur, Matthew, 244).

Further, naming disciples, not leading teachers, as light would have sounded ludicrous as the poor in spirit possessing the kingdom. This title had been given to Rabbis who wore it with great spectacle and were called “lamps of the universe, the lights of the world” (Spurgeon). Yet, this metaphor was not just applied to the disciples. We are the light of the world. We are no longer darkness but are actually lights ourselves because of what God has worked in us (cf. Eph 5:8). Disciples are light because they practice righteousness, and the world is darkness because it doesn’t.

“The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Romans 13:12-14)..

For, as Ephesians 5:8 says, “for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.” We used to be darkness, but now, we are light and commanded to live in accordance with that reality. We should “Keep our conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see our good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (1Peter 2:12).

So if light functions to dispel darkness, this is the function of His disciples. If it is to make clear paths, then that is our function. If it is to cause growth, then that is our function. If it is to generate comfort as in warmth, then that it is our function.

And last, Matthew 5:16 says, “let your light shine before people, so that they can see your good deeds and give honor to your Father in heaven.” We must notice the motive for shining our light. It is not so that people can glorify us, but so that they can glorify God. People often can discern the reasons that we do certain works. Are we doing good works for our benefit—to be seen and praised by others, to make money, to be promoted, etc.? If so, our lights will become dim and actually turn people away from God.

Psalm 115:1 sums up the attitude we should have. It says, “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!”

Review Questions:

1. In what ways do Christians positively influence their world?
2. What are the five purposes suggest in the above outline for salt. Which one seems the most likely to you and why? And, what are some practical ways we function as “salt?”
3. What happens to us if we lose our “saltiness?”
4. What purpose(s) does “light” serve?
5. Why and how might we be tempted to “hide our light?”
6. What is the result of people “seeing” our good works?
7. Can you have a stronger influence as “salt” and “light”?

Lesson 4

Kingdom Righteousness: The King and The Law (5:17-20)

Jesus began the sermon outlining what Citizens of His Kingdom will look like (I.e. character) and then what they will do (I.e. their calling). In this section, very much like a thesis to the whole sermon, is what the righteousness of the Kingdom really is.

When Jesus says, “Do not think ...,” we can assume that there are people who were thinking exactly that. Since the Pharisees would have accused Jesus of turning established tradition on its ear, it would not be surprising that the people would have thought it too. As a nation, the Jews believed that the Law of Moses was their unique possession. To repeal it would have seemed to be blasphemy.

“I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.”

Jesus revered His Father and His will (c.f. Luke 24:25-27; John 10:35). Every stroke, even the smallest, was of importance and to disregard one was to disregard all of it (c.f. James 2:8-12). That is why He says, He did not come **to abolish** the Law.

Instead, Jesus came **to fulfill** the grand purpose of the Law. Because He was born a Jew, Jesus lived under Moses’ Law (Galatians 4:4; 1Peter 2:22; Hebrews 4:15). But, what does ‘fulfill’ mean?”

1) Some understand that Jesus came, through His life, to fulfill the righteous requirement of the Law. And in other passages, that is what He did. However, Jesus is contrasting His teaching, not His actions. And at the end of the sermon, they are not amazed by His actions but “amazed by his teaching because he taught them like one who had authority, not like their experts in the law” (7:28b-29).

2) Others understand that Jesus fulfills the Law in that He completes it, or reveals its purpose (c.f. Romans 10:4-5). He fulfilled every shadow and type because each pointed to righteousness with God (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1ff). So, this is a true idea – but it may mean more here in the Sermon.

3) Others suggest that Jesus statement to “fulfill” means that He came to support the Law; that is, to tell people to obey it. He certainly did that (Matthew 23:23).

17 “Don’t think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished.

19 Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.

(CSB)

4) A fourth and preferable option connects to how Matthew has used the idea of fulfillment up to this point.

- Beginning in the first chapter, Matthew points out that Jesus, as the Christ, came in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Jesus did not descend from heaven unannounced to a people who had no inkling of His appearance. When He appeared, He fulfilled all that was spoken of Him.
 - **1:22-23.** ‘Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel, which is translated “God is with us.” [from Isaiah 7:14].
 - **2:4-6.** Speaking of Herod the Great: “So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born. “In Bethlehem of Judea,” they told him, “because this is what was written by the prophet: And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” [from Micah 5:2].
 - **2:15.** “He stayed there until Herod’s death, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: Out of Egypt I called my Son.” [from Hosea 11:1].
 - **2:17-18.** “Then what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be consoled, because they are no more” [from Jeremiah 31:15].
 - **3:3.** Speaking of John the Baptist: “For he is the one spoken of through the prophet Isaiah, who said: A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight!” [from Isaiah 40:3].
 - **4:12-16.** “This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, along the road by the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who live in darkness have seen a great light, and for those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned” [from Isaiah 9:1-2].
- Notice that Matthew has been laying the foundation for this fulfillment theme throughout the first four chapters, so when Jesus says He came to fulfill, **Matthew wants us to understand the statement in light of what has come before. That is to say that the Law and the Prophets pointed to Him prophetically.** So how could people think that He came to get rid of the Law and the Prophets? They point to Christ. Even Jesus said elsewhere, *“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled”* (Luke 24:44).

So if the Law’s purpose was realized, the Law no longer is valid but done away (c.f. Hebrews 7:12, 18-19; 8:13 and Galatians 5:2-4). Remember, His teaching is not a radical departure from Moses’ teaching but was actually explaining what God had wanted instead of listening and following what the Pharisees had been saying that God said (c.f. Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). The difference in the Law and the Gospel is the sacrificial, atoning death of Christ – the means of our righteousness.

No Jot or Tittle

After declaring that He came to fulfill, or in fulfillment of the Law, Jesus proceeds to affirm the value of the Law. Notice carefully verse 18: *“I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth pass away not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter will pass from the law until everything takes place.”* This statement confirms the fact that Jesus came **in fulfillment of the Law**. We don’t often think about the Law as

prefiguring Christ, but the writer of Hebrews shows us that it does. In addition, there are prophecies in the Law that look forward to the coming of Messiah and His work. What's more, the Law contains prophecies about the punishment and restoration of Israel. All these things must take place.

It is not only prophecies that look forward, but events do as well. Perhaps the greatest "prophetic event" is the Exodus. That great deliverance prefigures the salvation that we have experienced and will experience completely in heaven. On the day when the redeemed gather together before the throne, they will sing an old, old song. The Song of Moses!176

So Jesus the Christ stands here before His disciples and proclaims the enduring quality of the Law by saying that all of it must come to pass. Please don't get distracted by the little bits of the letters – the jots, or titles. It is true that Jesus is referring to the smallest letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the smallest portion of a letter, but these are simply illustrations, hyperbole, exaggeration, to make His point. What is His point? "God's revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai points to Me, and every last bit of it will be fulfilled!" It's like Maxwell House coffee, "Good to the last drop."

The Different Kind of Righteousness

Remember again, the contrast here is between Jesus and the right application of God's Law and the Pharisee's wrong application of God's Law. Jesus focused on the Pharisees (5:20) and "what you have heard the ancients were told" (5:21,27,33,38,43; Compare Matthew 23:13, 27-28). What Jesus wants to condemn and to exhort his hearers to leave is not the Law of Moses but the substitution of the Pharisaical traditions as the authoritative word of God.

Also, notice Deuteronomy 6:4-5, which became one, if not the central, passage in Israel's religion: "*Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one, and your shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength*" (NKJV). So realize that the LORD your God is the true God, the faithful God who keeps covenant faithfully with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations (Deuteronomy 7:9). Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you except to revere him, to obey all his commandments, to love him, to serve him with all your mind and being (Deuteronomy 10:12).

The demand for Love did not begin at Sinai but at Creation (c.f. Genesis 4:1-12; 6:5) as well as marriage (c.f. Genesis 2:24ff with Matthew 19:1-9) and honesty, integrity and non-retaliation. These are not Jewish Covenant obligations – these are human obligations.

God intended the Israelites to keep the Law. And that meant striving for the standard of the Father, humbly offering sacrifices, and calling on God for forgiveness when inevitable sins were committed. Paul's point is salvation from Abraham, through David and today with us on this side of the Cross, was always by grace through faith.

The problem was not that the Pharisees made the Law more doable, but that they changed the standard by which righteousness was evaluated. In the Law, the standard was God the Father (Leviticus 19:2): "You must be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy." The Pharisees said, "No, we will decide what holiness means, and we decide that keeping the rules will suffice!" We see hints of this in the New Testament. Notice Jesus' words in Luke 18:9: "Jesus also told this parable to some who were confident that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else."

These people justified themselves. The greatest treatise on these folks is Matthew 23. Yet, nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the Corban controversy in Mark 7:5-11. What was the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? It was a self-justifying righteousness based on the traditions that they said brought a right standing with God. It was righteousness on human terms – terms they had made for the people. The irony was that the standard they set resulted in Jesus’ own words, *“you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These things should have been done without neglecting the others”* (Matthew 23:23).

Gospel Righteousness, in contrast to the Pharisee’s righteousness, knows the full demand of law and humbly feels the increasing need for God’s mercy and help in attaining that “righteousness” (I.e. a right standing before God). Works of Law by the Pharisees were paraded as mindless rituals supposedly possessing justifying merit. Pharisaical righteousness was a hypocritical, configuration of human traditions. Kingdom righteousness is one of heart, the fountain head of one’s thoughts, will and deeds, in humble obedience to the King (c.f. 7:21-23). And Jesus demands of His Citizens: excel at this righteousness of the heart.

Questions for Review:

1. What did Jesus say about what He was NOT trying to do? What was He trying to do?
2. What did “Came to fulfill” mean?
3. What is righteousness as we discussed in class?
4. How would one excel the righteousness of the Pharisees?
5. How are we “great” in the kingdom?

Lesson 6

Fulfilling Kingdom Righteousness: Anger and Lust (5:21-30)

Jesus Jesus' first two contrasts to exceed the pharisaic righteousness that they were do used to seeing and hearing so that they could fulfill Kingdom Righteousness. Both of these are certainly related to the sixth and seventh commandments of the Mosaic Covenant that commanded Israel to not murder and to not commit adultery. However, remember His contrast is between what God meant and what "you have heard the ancients were told".

Interestingly, both of them clearly deal with the human heart. Anger boils out of a heart out of control. Words spew forth from a tongue uncontrolled by the heart. And murder acts out what the heart will not stop. So too adultery. It comes from passion unrestrained by the heart.

And that is why we keep reminding ourselves as we review these contrasts between "what the ancients have told you" and what God really said. While "Do Not Murder" is a quote from the 10 commandments, what follows (**and whoever murders will be subject to judgment**) is a paraphrase of the Old Testament rule of capital punishment and not a direct citation of Mosaic Law (c.f., Ex 21:12-14; Lev 24:17; Num 35:30-31). This gives further evidence about what Jesus is doing here. He is not contrasting Moses with Himself; He is contrasting what the "ancients" had taught them and Jesus takes them deeper to what "I say" was originally meant.

We will notice how these will all boil down to how Israel was to learn to love God with all of their heart, soul and mind and to love their neighbor as themselves. For as Jesus would say elsewhere, *"All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands"* (Matthew 22:40).

You shall not murder.

"Kill" as used in the KJV transation is better rendered "murder" since the prohibition God is making is not against taking human life, per se, but rather homicide. Law enjoined capital

21 "You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, Do not murder, and whoever murders will be subject to judgment.

22 But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Whoever insults his brother or sister will be subject to the court. Whoever says, 'You fool!' will be subject to hellfire.

23 So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother or sister has something against you,

24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

25 Reach a settlement quickly with your adversary while you're on the way with him to the court, or your adversary will hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison.

26 Truly I tell you, you will never get out of there until you have paid the last penny.

27 "You have heard that it was said, Do not commit adultery.

28 But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

29 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

(CSB)

punishment (c.f. Genesis 9:6; Exodus 21:12-14 with Romans 13:1ff) and even for the generation who would enter the Promised Land, God would command death to the idolatrous Canaanites. **God would not forbid what He would later command.** Instead, Jesus is saying that what God has been again is murderous meditation.

Apparently, the scribes and Pharisees took this to only prohibit the very act of murder. The Ancients taught that any thoughts, words or deeds that might lead to murder were not addressed by this law, just the act. Jesus disagreed.

Jesus said, *“Every one who is angry”* is guilty. *“Without a cause”* (KJV) occurs in most of the early manuscripts but not in the very earliest of the best manuscripts (Stott, 83). Because it almost appears to soften the hardness of the command of Jesus, many consider it a deliberate addition to the text (for the reason above). However, it does seem to convey Jesus’ meaning here. That is, “anger with cause” may be an “anger” that is not evil (I.e. God). Sometimes we might call this “permissible” anger, “righteous” anger. Martin Luther called it “an anger of love, one that wishes no one any evil, one that is friendly to the person but hostile to the sin” (ibid.). Yet, Paul will later teach, “Be angry and do not sin’ [c.f. Ps 4:4]. Don’t let the sun go down on your anger, and don’t give the devil an opportunity” (Ephesians 4:26-27).

In fact, Jesus uses three enigmatic statements: You will suffer judgment, the court and hellfire. Murder is only the outward manifestation, however, of what we are liable. Jesus says that thoughts and words (from the heart, c.f. 12:34) deserve punishment. And while “brother” (adelphoi) is the word Jesus used, “it would be pedantic to suggest that Jesus’ ruling applies only to relations with fellow disciples and not to people in general; vv. 44-47 suggest otherwise” (France, 200). The punishments ascend in severity but there does not seem to be an ascending in the crime. The first and second happen in the mind, the third is in the speech. Ordinarily insulting your brother is usually not because of his foolishness – but because of the lovelessness of the insulter’s heart. However, placing hellfire last may have been the intentional shock to the hearer that Jesus suggested litigation against what one thought until it finally bubbled out of the mouth only to lead to such eternal punishment.

Anger prompted by pride, vanity, hate or revenge leads to the very insults to which Jesus refers (I.e. Raca) and will ultimately, lead to murder. But Jesus is saying that the whole Law was not intended to prohibit actions. It should have awakened within what needed to be controlled within. These insults referred to by Jesus are clearly derisive, insulting words, and hard to translate to our culture. However, the best effort is in the New English Bible, “If he abuses his brother . . . If he sneers at him.” While these angry thoughts and insulting words may never lead to the ultimate act of murder, they are “murder in the heart” with God (c.f. 1John 3:15) and sin needing repentance.

You shall not lust.

The same is true for uncontrolled sexual passion. Jesus quotes the Septuigent of Exodus 20:14. And that law is specific to the man who has sexual relations with another man’s wife. While adolescent consciences need to be warned of the allure of gazing upon the nakedness of the opposite sex, it seems that Jesus is constructing the picture of a man who “wants to have sex” with the woman who is not his and he plans the illicit sexual liason (c.f. Ex 20:17). Of course, this was the demise of King David whose actions lead not only to the adultery but also to a murder (c.f. 2Samuel 11:2-4).

There are many OT allusions to the same thing to which Jesus is aiming. Job spoke of the covenant he made with his eyes (31:1,9) and the wise man warned of what happens in the heart (c.f. Prov 6:25). There were even additional writings that read: “Whoever gazes intentionally at a woman is as though he had intercourse with her” (Kallah 7, quoted in France, 204).

Jesus goes on to use a metaphor of self-mutilation as he will later (18:8-9; c.f. Mk 9:43-48). The mention of the “right” eye has been suggested to mean that since even then, right handed-ness was most common, that even if the “right” eye needs to be removed, you are much better without it.

To cause to stumble is used often in Matthew (11:6; 13:21; 13:41; 13:53; 15:12; 16:23; 17:27; 18:6-7; 18:8-9; 24:10; 26:31-33). Most often, this refers to something that deflects someone from the path of right doing (13:21; 18:6, et.al). Here, it results in the loss of salvation in Gehenna.

We should note that there is no Victorian prudery with Jesus. Loving sex in marriage is beautiful and divine (c.f. Song of Solomon). It is not the looking, but lusting that plots the liason, that Jesus condemns. Let the marriage bed be undefiled (Hebrews 13:6) is a command to the one IN the bed and to the one who is trying to GET INTO the bed.

What Jesus said is that if the deed is immoral – so is the thought. If the act of adultery begins with adultery in the heart and that begins with adultery in the eye – then Jesus says begin at the beginning. “Cut the eye out”. This dramatic figure of speech must be taken as figuratively as “Cut the heart out” would be too.

So, to obey these heart commands may require maiming for some of us. But Heaven will be worth it all.

Questions For Review:

1. How does Jesus connect murder and anger (21-22)?
2. From our discussion above, upon what two commands does the whole Law depend?
3. What three things does Jesus teach that we should do when we know a brother has something against us (23-26)?

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4. Why do we allow anger toward a person to remain in our heart rather than reconcile?
5. Based on what Jesus says in verse 28, what were the scribes and Pharisees likely teaching about what one could and could not do regarding sexual immorality? How were they using the Law?
6. Where does Jesus say we need to take up the spiritual battle against adultery (5:28; cf. Matthew 15:19-20)?
7. What is the remedy to these kinds of temptations (5:29-30)? Explain. Read Colossians 3:5-6 and 2 Timothy 2:22 also as you answer.
8. Why do we need to fight for purity (5:29-30)?

Lesson 7

Fulfilling Kingdom Righteousness: Divorce and Deception (5:31-37)

Jesus continues His contrasts with “*What you have heard was said*” with “*And I say to you*” with the third and the fourth in this lesson.

Divorce is a controversial and complex subject among Christians, families that experience it and the world. There is almost no unhappiness as painful as unhappy marriages. The tragedy of broken relationships, hearts that often degenerate to bitterness and despair makes this discussion often uncomfortable and avoided. And we should be sensitive to every one – yet these are the words Jesus said long ago about righteousness in the kingdom.

These two verses in Jesus’ Sermon are not the sum total of Jesus’ teaching on divorce. Rather, it is an appropriate connective to the previous contrast on lust – and an abbreviated summary of what He will later teach in His response to the Pharisees who seek to entrap Him in Matthew 19:1-9.

That discussion was borne out of a question that was prompted by the debated conclusions between the religious schools of Hillel and Shammai. Revolving around Deuteronomy 24, it seems that they wanted to tag which view Jesus was taking: the more conservative (Shammai)

who limited the “unseemly thing” of Deuteronomy 24 to some grave matrimonial offence while the more lax school (Hillel) broadened it to include anything the man though unseemly, a view favored by the Pharisees (c.f. 19:3). Jesus disagreed.

Instead, his counter-question in Matthew 19 demanded a view that made marriage, a relationship made and viewed by God as **permanent**, not only as permanent as the husband wanted it to be. Further, Jesus says there (and repeats in our reading) that the only concession God allows for remarriage is a divorce caused by infidelity. Just as adultery freed the innocent partner under the Law by the adulterer’s death, so too Jesus says it frees a partner to remarry. God instituted marriage to be indissoluble, a union only He breaks and not man. Jesus’ conclusion is that if one divorces his partner and marries another, or marries a divorced person (5:32), they enter a forbidden, adulterous relationship, the same thing He taught here in the Sermon on the Mount. The only exception to this rule, is divorcing an adulterous spouse, in order to find a faithful one. To be preoccupied with other grounds of divorce is to be guilty of the Pharisaism Jesus condemned.

31 “It was also said, Whoever divorces his wife must give her a written notice of divorce.

32 But I tell you, everyone who divorces his wife, except in a case of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

33 “Again, you have heard that it was said to our ancestors, You must not break your oath, but you must keep your oaths to the Lord.

34 But I tell you, don’t take an oath at all: either by heaven, because it is God’s throne;

35 or by the earth, because it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King.

36 Do not swear by your head, because you cannot make a single hair white or black.

37 But let your ‘yes’ mean ‘yes,’ and your ‘no’ mean ‘no.’ Anything more than this is from the evil one..

(CSB)

Also, a “certificate of divorce” is only mentioned twice in the Old Testament: Deuteronomy 24:1-2 and Jeremiah 3:8. From the passage in Deuteronomy, the certificate of divorce appears to serve two functions: (1) a woman who was sent away was to be given a certificate of divorce, but (2) the man who divorced his wife and gave her a certificate of divorce could not in the future take her back as a wife. It is generally held that these provisions were for the protection of wives based upon the conditions surrounding the provision. Notice the the “if” “and” construction in this reading from the ESV.

When a man takes a wife and marries her, **if** then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, **and** he writes her a certificate of divorce **and** puts it in her hand **and** sends her out of his house, **and** she departs out of his house, 2 **and if** she goes and becomes another man's wife, 3 **and** the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce **and** puts it in her hand **and** sends her out of his house, **or if** the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, 4 **then** her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord..

The passage in Jeremiah illustrates this situation by speaking of the Lord giving Israel a certificate of divorce because she played the harlot.

In Deuteronomy 24, on what basis can a man give his wife a certificate of divorce? The debate that occurred in Jesus’ day and continues even today as to what “some uncleanness” (ASV “some unseemly thing”; RSV, NASV, ESV, CSB “some indecency”, HCSB “something improper”, NRSV “something objectionable”) means. The root meaning of the word is ‘nakedness’. Thus, the School of Shammai limited the expression to sexual immorality, whereas the School of Hillel gave it a very broad meaning to include about any imaginable objection a husband might have against a wife.

Edersheim cautions, however, that not even the Shammaites were that strict in their practice of limiting divorce to cases involving sexual immorality. In other words, divorce for any reason was commonly practiced [Life and Times, II, p.333].

Davies and Allison state “On the whole, and despite a few rabbinic texts which mourn divorce..., the impression one gains from ancient Jewish sources is that divorce was relatively easy and was not considered a grave misdeed [Matthew, I, p.528].)

As has been suggested in earlier lessons, it appears that a major purpose of Jesus in this section **is to contrast the righteousness required of kingdom citizens to that of the Pharisees and scribes**. Thus it would be helpful if we could understand how the Pharisees viewed divorce.

When Jesus responded to them in Matthew 19 by asking them what the Law of Moses said, what does their response omit? They said, “7 “Why then,” they asked him, “did Moses command us to give divorce papers and to send her away?” Notice, there is nothing mentioned about Deuteronomy 24:4 about how the woman was to be protected. Does this not suggest that their attitude toward the reason for divorce was in their favor? In other words, do you think they were strict or liberal in their understanding of Deut. 24?

Jesus teaching on divorce highlights the string of consequences that follow.

Further, there is much discussion about the exception clause “except for sexual immorality” that only is recorded by Matthew in his gospel (5:32 and 19:9). What is the exception? It is “Sexual immorality” (NKJV, ESV, HCSB; Gk porneia) and is also translated “fornication” (KJV, ASV), “unchastity” (RSV, NASV, NRSV, REB), “sexually unfaithful” (NET), “marital unfaithfulness” (NIV), and “lewd conduct” (NAB). Most agree that the term **represents a broad range of sexual sins**, although some have argued for a narrow definition (e.g. fornication or incest).

And the final review about to whom the exception applies is also debated. In other words, if the wife is guilty of “sexual immorality”, does her husband sin in putting her away? Does she sin if she remarries? Does the man who marries the woman guilty of “sexual immorality” sin?

One last word, however, is that Jesus’ reluctance to grant the right to remarriage places a demand on Kingdom citizens to seek reconciliation with the unfaithful spouse. As Chrysostom wrote long ago, *“For he that is meek, and a peacemaker, and poor in spirit, and merciful, how shall he cast out his wife? He that is used to reconcile others, how shall he be at variance with her that is his own.”* (Stott, 98).

And then Jesus says, “Do Not Make Oaths.” Just as permissive as the Rabbis were in marriage, they were in speech. They developed an intriguing formula of oath-making to keep the average Joe from sin (they thought). Only by using the Lord’s name did one need to feel obliged to keep his word. When you did not keep a Lord-oath, you were guilty of profanity instead of perjury.

Jesus expressed his contempt for this kind of sophistry by later calling them blind guides (Matthew 23:16-22) and urging people to see Moses’ words (Exodus 20:7; Leviticus 19:12; Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21) for what they were in plain intention: the prohibition of false swearing or perjury.

So, is “swearing condemned”? Would God Himself use what is forbidden (c.f. Genesis 22:16,17, Hebrews 6:13-18)? And is the prohibition absolute? Must we declare to take an affidavit? Did not Jesus? (Matthew 26:63,64).

We have oaths because men are often liars. So oaths induce people to trust. Honest men do not need to resort to oaths to be trusted is what Jesus is getting at – not that Kingdom Citizens can not take an oath when required by an external authority. Our yes must be yes and no, no. As Stott says, “And when a monosyllable will do, why waste our breath by adding to it?” (102).

Questions for review:

1. Jesus reaches back to Genesis 2 for His lesson on marriage. What does it teach us?
2. In verse 31 when Jesus is stating what had been said, what is the thrust of that statement? In other words, what point does the statement make?

3. Does the statement speak to the reason for the divorce?

4. In Matthew 19:3, the Pharisees ask Jesus the question if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason. How do you think those Pharisees would have answered that question? (see 19:7)

5. In the parallel account to Matthew 19 in Mark 10, how is the question of the Pharisees phrased differently? (10:2)

6. Is Jesus' answer in Matthew 19 substantially the same as He preached in the Sermon on the Mount? Who, according to Jesus, may remarry?

7. Why and why is Jesus opposed to oaths?

8. Can a Kingdom Citizen sign affidavits and give evidence under oath?

Lesson 8

Fulfilling Kingdom Righteousness: Retaliation and Hate (5:38-48)

Jesus has considered murder (5:21-26), adultery (5:27-30), divorce (5:31-32), and deception (5:33-37). And now, His final two contrasts escalate to where the basis of all of these commands spring: the great commands. It was for Israel the better way. But it was for all of humanity the only way. And it will be for Christians – the only way. The objects of this love are surprising. It is not just our neighbor but rather ones that Jesus calls an evildoer (39) and enemy (44). Nowhere is the challenge to be different greater and more difficult than here in the Sermon: Turn (39), Share (40), Go (41), Give (42), Love (44)... These are the ways Jesus says God wants His people to be.

Do not Retaliate

The quote excerpted by Jesus is from Mosaic Law in Exodus 21:23-24.

If there is an injury, then you must give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, bruise for bruise, wound for wound.

This *lex talionis*, the principle of exact retribution was found in other ancient laws, including the Code of Hammurabi, which was written over 100 years before the Mosaic law (MacArthur, J. F., Jr., Matthew, 329–330), and it is the basis of our legal systems today. *Lex Talionis* is Latin and is the same idea found in the expressions “tit for tat” or “quid pro quo.” As with all the OT law, it represented God’s righteousness and was a good law. It was especially good because it allowed for fairness in the administration of justice and it restrained man’s sinful nature.

It’s placement in Exodus has an interesting context (Exodus 21-23). First of all, it follows the first 10 commandments of the Covenant which argues that though it was a principle of justice in other cultures that God had already put in motion (c.f. Genesis 4:10).

Second, after the first collection of ordinances for slaveholders, Moses provides God’s ordinance that if someone “strikes a person so that he dies must be put to death” (12). He distinguishes

38 “You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

39 But I tell you, don’t resist an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

40 As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well.

41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two.

42 Give to the one who asks you, and don’t turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

43 “You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

46 For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same?

47 And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don’t even the Gentiles do the same?

48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

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between intentional (14) which will be a capital crime and unintentional (13) in which God will provide in Cities of Refuge. There are more specific ordinances for differing relationships listed – but the *lex talionis* is stated in the middle of an ordinance regarding two men who struggle and clearly do not intend to hard the pregnant woman. Retribution should be exact, Moses said.

Of course, the place of *lex talionis* in this context affirms that this instruction was for Israel's judges to decide and execute – not the common man. It's intent was first to lay a judicial foundation or equal punishment and to limit compensation to the victim to exact equivalents in order to restrain revenge (and prohibiting family retaliations). By Jesus' time, literal payment had been replaced in "Jewish legal practice by money penalties or damages" (Stott, 104) (c.f. Exodus 21:26-27). For the Pharisees, they evidently had moved this just principle from the law courts where it belonged to *personal relationships where it did not*. The result was the justification of personal revenge which the law expressly forbade (Leviticus 19:18).

Today, some have said that "do not resist the evildoer" means that Christians should not resist evil at all in society—but that is not the point. Even in this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ is confronting the Pharisees' wrong teachings on the law. He is resisting evil. Most of the epistles are Christ's apostles resisting evil and evil people, as they wrote to correct false teaching and false teachers. In fact, Christ commanded believers to resist evil among fellow church members. In Matthew 18:15-17, he said when someone is in sin, we should confront him first one on one, then with two or three others, and if he still won't repent, it should be brought before the church. And if the person still clings to his sin, he should be removed from the congregation. To obey Christ, Christians must, in fact, resist evil! Christ was forbidding personal retaliation, not civil justice. He was dealing with how we respond when evil is committed against us personally.

Jesus' responses do not be negate the responsibility of courts and governments to execute justice (c.f. Romans 13:1-3). However, Jesus DOES intend to regulate and to prohibit this retribution by persons in personal relationships. From person to person, Jesus implies, love must reign supreme. Our duty to individuals who wrong us is not retaliation – but love without retaliation. Jesus does not deny that things could be evil; Nor should His words be contrived to tell us to ignore or condone such behavior. He simply says, "*Do not retaliate*" (c.f. Romans 12:17-21 and 1Peter 2:20-23).

Jesus illustrates this point in four ways:

1. One who hits us in the face,
 - a. When Christ refers to being slapped on the right cheek, he is not referring to being physically attacked. To be slapped on the right cheek, one would need to use the back of one's right hand (as most people are right handed), which was culturally considered a deep insult. According to rabbinical law, being slapped with the back of the hand was twice more offensive than being slapped with an open hand. It was like being called a nothing and, in context, it probably referred to being called a heretic. (Hughes, R. K. The Sermon on the Mount: the message of the kingdom, 133).
2. one who prosecutes us,
 - a. When Christ referred to being sued for a shirt, he was referring to a tunic, which was more like an ancient suit. A person would typically own multiple tunics. The coat, however, was very expensive, and people typically only owned one (Boice, J. M., The Sermon on the Mount: An expositional commentary, 137–138). Often, they were used as blankets to keep people warm at night and in the winter. According to the Mosaic

law, people couldn't be sued for their coats. Keeping one's coat was an inalienable right. It was considered inhumane to take a person's coat. How would they stay warm at night or in the winter? If it was taken as a pledge, it had to be returned by the evening (cf. Deut 24:12-14). Exodus 22:26-27 says: "If you do take the garment of your neighbor in pledge, you must return it to him by the time the sun goes down, for it is his only covering—it is his garment for his body. What else can he sleep in? And when he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am gracious" (c.f. Hebrews 10:32-35).

3. one who commandeers our labor, and
 - a. Roman soldiers had legal rights to make a civilian carry their luggage up to one Roman mile, which was slightly less than a mile today. However, they could not make civilians carry the luggage longer than that. This is probably what happened with Simon of Cyrene when he was forced to carry Jesus' cross (Matt 27:32).
4. another who begs money from us.
 - a. Finally, we must not only sacrifice our rights to retaliate, to our own possessions, and to our time, we also must give up our rights to our money. Again, this is very difficult to hear, as money is very hard to earn and even harder to keep. However, Paul said if people do not work, they shouldn't eat (2Thes 3:10). The church was called to not support these errant members but to warn and challenge them in love (v. 15). There is a need for discernment—we certainly shouldn't give money to every request.

Jesus urges us to pursue non-retaliation even if it means we double the injury. "We are to be the anvils when bad men are the hammers," Spurgeon once said. Romans 12:20-21 says, "Rather, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in doing this you will be heaping burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but **overcome evil with good.**"

Do Not Hate

He has challenged five misinterpretations of the law where the religious leaders lowered God's standards: murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, and eye for an eye. This is the sixth and final one where Christ discusses love for our enemies.

Who one's neighbor was, was a running theological debate among the Jews. When Christ taught that loving God and loving one's neighbor were the greatest laws, a Jew questioned, "*Who is my neighbor?*" as though it wasn't obvious (Lk 10:29). Christ answered by teaching the Parable of the Good Samaritan (v. 30-37). Jews hated Samaritans and in the story, Jesus challenged their presumptions and prejudice to make the good neighbor to the Jewish man a Gentile – and even worse, a Samaritan (36-37). A Jewish man was hurt and, while religious leaders walked by and did nothing to help him, a Samaritan cared for him and gave him the help needed. At this point in history, the religious leaders taught a very limited view of "love your neighbor." It referred only to Jews—not to Gentiles, and certainly not to one's enemy.

Leviticus 19, where Moses speaks of the neighbor (13, 15, 16, 17) and Jews were called to love their neighbor (v. 18). Because Moses began with "Speak to the whole congregation of the Israelites" (v. 1), Jews argued that loving one's neighbor was limited by that context. However, even within chapter 19, there are many calls to love Gentiles.

- Do not strip your vineyard bare or gather its fallen grapes. Leave them for the poor and the resident alien (10)

- When an alien resides with you in your land, you must not oppress him. You will regard the alien who resides with you as the native-born among you. You are to love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God (33-34)

This was a choice omission by the religious leaders. Among Jews living in Christ's day, this belief was very common. The Qumran sect who preserved the Dead Sea Scrolls had a common saying, "Love the brother; hate the outsider." Essentially, many Jews believed it was their duty to love fellow Israelites and hate outsiders. Instead of love, racism and ethnocentrism were exalted. (And both still thrives today).

So, this last quote is clearly a perversion of Mosaic Law since the LORD never commanded Israel to hate anyone (see intro). Instead we are commanded to love everyone. We are, when comparing what Jesus said in Luke's record of a similar sermon, "Do good" even to enemies (Luke 6:27,35). Be a . . . "Do-gooder." Yes. Even to the evil. Yes. Just like God. For we are to "perfect" in love just as the Father is. Our aim, our goal is to look nothing like the world – but look like the Father (c.f. 1John 4:12,17).

Questions for Review:

1. What are the differences in what might be the "natural" reaction most would have and what Jesus demands?
2. How are we to treat enemies?
3. How can Christians love this way and still not be "doormats"?

Lesson 9

Righteousness and Piety: The True Reward (6:1) and Devotion (6:2-18)

Previously, Jesus addressed the character of citizens of the kingdom of heaven and their blessedness. He called believers to be light and to be salt. He confronted what others had said about His purpose and then followed with contrast of true righteousness of the Law versus what “you have heard that was said.” In this section of the Sermon, Jesus moves from what teachers had misspoken about the Law to how wrong the same teachers engage in simple acts of piety in the Law: Charity (6:1-4); Prayer (6:5-15) and Fasting (6:16-18). The entire context follows what He had already strongly declared (5:20) that if our righteousness doesn’t surpass that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, **we will not enter the kingdom of heaven.** Therefore, Christ is warning his followers to bear the fruits that match their kingdom citizenship.

Further, while these principles are radical in comparison to what Jews then saw in their leaders, it is implicit that these were not new demands – but demands of what righteousness should look like. Further, three times Jesus says: Don’t act “as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets” (2), Don’t “be like the hypocrites” (5), “don’t babble like the Gentiles” (7) and “don’t be gloomy like the hypocrites” (16). And then, He will conclude each section with “your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (4, 6, 18).

This call to “not be like them” is really no surprise for most readers. God is always calling His people to be different and non-conformist to the pagan world. But here, Jesus demands that we not conform to the “hypocrite” (ie. The one whose pretense is that they follow God’s will but really do not). And this is clearly a precursor to His later diatribe against the *religious establishment* in Matthew 23. He saw the worldliness and pride of the Pharisees and scribes, and even perhaps the Sadducees, which becomes for us a valid warning to seeking nominal Christianity or believing that following Jesus is not radical. The Kingdom righteousness we must excel at moves beyond a call to character, a comparison of righteous

6:1 “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward with your Father in heaven. 2 So whenever you give to the poor, don’t sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be applauded by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. 3 But when you give to the poor, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

5 “Whenever you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 7 When you pray, don’t babble like the Gentiles, since they imagine they’ll be heard for their many words. 8 Don’t be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask him.

9 “Therefore, you should pray like this: Our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

14 “For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. 15 But if you don’t forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses.

16 “Whenever you fast, don’t be gloomy like the hypocrites. For they disfigure their faces so that their fasting is obvious to people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that your fasting isn’t obvious to others but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

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ordinances from what they were taught to the demand of what Jesus wanted our piety to look like.

And Jesus begins with a warning to not be like the Pharisees at all: “**Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward with your Father in heaven.**” If we do for God what we do for publicity, the only reward we will have is publicity. But we will have no reward with God. This is not to limit praying before others, Jesus did (John 11:38-44). This is not to limit giving to help others and that they know you did, Tabitha (Dorcus) did (Acts 9:36-42). This is not to limit fasting to the Old Testament or to private chambers, the church did (Acts 13:2, 14:23,)

Giving

In the sermon, Jesus has not mentioned the typical manifestation of the religious life: tithes, sacrifice, days, etc... Instead, each of the contrasts deal with the personal exhibition of life lived in obedience to what God has said. So too in chapter six, we move to something rarely listed as a matter of morality. Yet, here Jesus said, “*whenever you give.*” It’s not just going about being kind. It involves piety: prayer, alms, giving. But it is not just about piety either as we have noted. So a balanced picture of Kingdom living includes Christian behavior with people as much as it does with other Christians “in church.” Everything we do matters to the Lord.

We should note that the fundamental problem Jesus addresses is not merely being public about our righteousness – it is being righteous in public for publicity’s sake. It is in fact “to be seen by them.” The stern warning, “No reward from the Father” should make humble Citizens gladly resign the empty ritual. Instead, we should generously give to the poor with the right motives – love for them not love for self. Jesus calls them “hypocrites,” a common theatrical term used in the time for actors. Here Jesus uses it to describe the Citizen who parades himself in a humble disguise only to have no reward in heaven. But the reward he will get comes from the ones he tries to impress – praise for a season.

Prayer

The single contrast Jesus disparages in their prayers is the “*meaningless repetition*” (6:7). He adds that they think their gods will hear them for their “*many words*”. The term used for “*meaningless repetition*” in Greek is *battalogo*. It is used only here in the NT and “no other use of the word is known beyond the quotations of this verse” (Stott, 143). Most regard the word to be an onomatopoeic expression where the sound of the word indicates its meaning (I.e. crash, boom, slash). William Tyndale was first to translate it, “babble”, and it seems the best English equivalent. Jesus’ concern then does not seem to be repetition per se (I.e. Matthew 26:44) but **vain** repetitions. It describes better that type of prayer that is all words and no meaning, all lips and no mind.

One cursory note is that this babbling was common in Pagan temples during prayer when priests and priestesses were seized into a frenzy of ecstatic utterance during their “babbling.” As Paul says later, “When you were pagans, you were *led astray* to dumb idols” in some kind of external control - much like can be seen in some modern “tongue speaking” in charismatic churches. (See Melvin Curry, *Tongues – Pentecostal or Pagan? Praise, Prayer and Providence*, FC Lectures, 1987, 200). And Jesus says, “Do not be like them.” There are many contemporary applications to Jesus’ demand. Can you think of some?

In contrast then to the Pharisaic way of prayer (ostentatious and self-centered) and the Pagan way of prayer (empty and meaningless), Jesus pictures Kingdom prayer as meaningful communication centered around God. The model prayer of Jesus (see Luke 11:2), learned by many as “the” prayer to pray, is not a rote mechanic prayer to be used in a pagan way. Rather, it is a *picture* of what constitutes Kingdom prayer. We should note first that Kingdom prayer is to be **personal**, “Our Father” and second to be **pious**, “Hallowed be Your name” (treating God holy). Third, it must give God’s concerns first **priority** (Your name, Your Kingdom,

Your will) and fourth, it will give **place to personal needs** committed to God (give us, forgive us, deliver us). This is a model of real, Kingdom prayer for the Christian.

The sin of the hypocrite's prayer is his *selfishness*. His obsession with self-image and his appearance to others will empty his prayer of any meaning to the Father. And the sin of the pagan's prayer is *mindless ness*. His babbling and mindless devotion to liturgy leaves God unimpressed with his verbiage. But Christian prayer is real, meaningful communication with a Father who is both personal and powerful – able and affectionate.

Jesus tells us to pray to “Our Father in heaven.” This should set our mental attitude to God, supreme over the universe. From the Old Testament and much of the New, we understand that we are praying to God, and that He is our Lord and King. But Jesus tells us that we can come to Him and call Him, “Father,” a more significant relationship than we would imagine. The entire sermon has many references to God as our Father. This relationship is our primary motivation for the lives that we should live.

God as Father is a two-way relationship. As Father, He loves us, and we honor Him. He protects, and we abide. He provides, and we give thanks. He instructs, and we emulate. He disciplines us, and we mature. He touches, and we respond. He commands, and we obey. So much of the time we focus on command/obedience, and we forget all the other wonderful aspects of our walk with our Father. When we approach Him in prayer, He is all these things for us, and we need to be all these things to Him.

And the model in this prayer seems to have the focus of the community – not the individual (“us” and “our”). We are to be intercessors. We pray “Give us ...,” and we are asking for the Father's provision for family, friend, and foe. We pray “Forgive us ...,” and we seek reconciliation with the Father and among ourselves. We pray “Lead us ...” and “Deliver us ...” because we all need proper guidance and protection.

We are to pray that the Father's name “be honored.” This is both a request and an attitude. As a request, we are asking for the knowledge of the Father to fill the earth and for the earth to respond in honor. As an attitude, we can begin our prayers with worship, praise, and thanksgiving. We worship who He is. We praise Him for His works, and we thank Him for His care and provision.

We ask for the Father's kingdom to come. Along these lines, we pray for the spread of the gospel and the establishment of the rule and reign of the Father in the hearts of men and women. We pray for the welfare of the distressed and oppressed. We pray for physical healing, deliverance, change of hearts, broken relationships, and such things as would change with an acceptance of the Father and His ways. We also look forward to Jesus' return to live and rule among us. This is the kingdom coming – in Him – to the world.

Fasting

Continuing the contrast, the Pharisees who loved to fast (and be seen fasting twice a week, c.f. Luke 19:12, 5:33) are no example to how Christians should fast. Christians must do what they do to please God and not to be seen by others. While fasting could be called an Old Testament practice and is often associated with religious error in the Roman church, we need not be selective in our use of Scripture.

Jesus did say to disciples, “When you do fast ...” not if you ever ... He even described that “When the bridegroom would be taken away ... Then they would.” (Matthew 9:15). And there is clear historic precedent that the early church fasted (Acts 9:9; 13:3).

Jesus is contrasting ostentatious and vain worship in contrast to the true piety of Kingdom citizens. If we want human spectators to our piety, we will lose God. But if we lose ourselves in God, what does it matter if

anyone ever sees us? Be different. Be righteous in piety.

Jesus has already discussed the Jewish leaders' hypocrisy of praying to be seen of men. Now, He turns His audience's attention to the folly of the Gentile or pagan worshipper.

Questions for Review

1. How do we harmonize "Letting our light shine before men" and "not practicing our righteousness before men"?
2. Should Christians fast? Why? How?
3. Why do Christians give, pray and fast?
4. What was the sin of the Hypocrite's prayer? How could we be guilty of this hypocrisy?
5. What was the sin of the pagan's prayer? How could we be guilty of this "meaningless repetition"?
6. What four aspects of content do you see in the Lord's Model Prayer?
7. How could our prayers improve with Jesus' as the model?

Lesson 10

May 16

Righteousness and Piety: The True Treasure (6:19-34)

The true reward (1) and devotion of charity (6:1-4); prayer (6:5-15) and fasting (6:16-18) is now followed with the true treasure (19-34) in . In our materialistic society, perhaps no passage is more practical than Matthew 6:19-34. Why? Because our treasures are so influential to what we pursue and what we do. Yet, we don't want to disconnect this from its immediate context or we will miss a very important part of the challenge of these verses.

What then is the call of those who follow the King in the good news of the kingdom that He shared so that they can fulfill their calling? Their faith must demonstrate the fruit of the gospel and the fruit of penitent lives. This dramatic change in the direction of their lives comes as a contrast. Their righteousness must exceed that of the religious Pharisees; it must be different. Unless we grasp the significance of this and operate in obedience to it, we too will fail to fulfill our purpose as the people of God. We are light and we are salt.

Jesus described in our last lessons the private part of our piety, giving, prayer, and fasting. Now He addresses our public business of life in the world: money, possessions, food, drink, clothing. Of course, these distinctions are not completely separate. We must remember that everything we do, however "secular" it may seem, is religious in the sense God is present and it must be done according to His will. But the point Jesus makes here profoundly is that God is **not merely concerned with the sacred and religious** piety of our life, but also all aspects of our life. "Our Father sees in secret" (6:4,6,18) but "Our heavenly Father [also] knows what you need" (6:32).

Ambition is common to everyone. From childhood to adulthood, we have many. Common adult ambitions are wealth, fame or power. But as Christians, what should our ambition be?

Two Treasures (6:19-20).

WHAT WE ARE NOT TO DO (19a). Jesus is concerned about that and shows in this section the folly of following the wrong way and the wisdom of choosing the right. The verb "lay up" is *thesaurizo* and "treasures" is *thesauros*, "treasure, wealth, valuable

6:19 "Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So if the light within you is darkness, how deep is that darkness!

24 "No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

25 "Therefore I tell you: Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Consider the birds of the sky: They don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they? 27 Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying? 28 And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don't labor or spin thread. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these. 30 If that's how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won't he do much more for you—you of little faith? 31 So don't worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. 34 Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

(CSB)

possession, whether physical, spiritual or intellectual.” It refers to a lake of wealth. Our word thesaurus, which means a treasury of words, comes from this word. The Greek verb means, “to treasure up, store, hoard, stock pile.”

The reason we are to not pursue them is their futility and earth-bound frailty (19b): “Where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.” Moths destroy clothing: In ancient times, most of the clothing was made of wool and the moth loves wool and could ruin an expensive garment overnight. The word “rust” is literally “that which consumes, an eating away,” and is translated “food, meat” everywhere but here. It brings to mind those things in this life which disfigure, destroy, and ruin the things we value are rust, rats, mice, roaches, termites, and worms. Thieves refer to the age-old problem of those who, rather than working for their living, intrude and force their way into homes and take the property and valuables of others. The constancy of this, evident in the present tense Jesus uses, remind us that because of life’s brevity and wealth’s insecurity, to lay up treasures on earth is foolish. Change and decay are all around us and, if we weren’t so blind, they would be a constant reminder and check on the value system that drives our lives.

WHAT WE SHOULD BE DOING (20a): “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” First, to do this means that we recognize that we are here as sojourners, temporary residents on special assignment (cf. Ps 39:4-6; 90:12). It means faith in the realities and promises of heaven. Second, to store treasures in heaven requires earthly time and commitment of our lives to new values and priorities. Our stewardship consist of:

1. TIME (it takes earthly time to store up heavenly treasure),
2. TALENTS (gifts and abilities),
3. TREASURES (earthly wealth, money, things, etc.),
4. TEMPLE (our individual body, 1Co 6:18-19, and our collective body, 3:16, is God’s temple), and
5. TRUTH (the gospel).

Our stewardship consists in how well we invest those assets for the Lord and heavenly treasure.

He presents His concerns, again, as contrasts. The first is the two treasures (19-21). The second is the two visions (22-23). The third is two masters (24). And the final is the two ambitions (25-34). The concern Jesus has is that His Citizens will not be like the Gentiles (32) who exemplify the wrong way.

Jesus compares the durability of these treasures and urges us to choose Heaven’s. But what did Jesus prohibit in this earth? He could not be merely be prohibiting having possessions. The wise man encourages us to save our wealth as well as share it (Pr 6:6; 1Ti 5:8). The wise man of Ecclesiastes recommended enjoying the treasures of earth we have – as well as did the Apostle Paul (Ec 11:9; 1Ti 4:3-4; 6:17). Rather, what Jesus is focused on in these contrastive demands is the selfish passion for possession. “For yourselves,” He said. Martin Luther once wrote, “there are two plagues that always arise: false preachers who corrupt the teaching and then Sir Greed who obstructs right living” (Stott, 155).

Two Visions (6:22-23)

Gathering up riches here on the earth blurs our vision. It causes us not to see the truth, the will of God, correctly. It distorts our vision, causing us to not see God as clearly. In the example of Ananias and Sapphira (Ac 5:1-11), their love for wealthy blinded them to the lie they hatched to emerge as important as Barnabus; And, then there is the parable of Jesus of the Rich Fool (Lk 12:13-21). In this parable, Jesus said that “one’s life does not consist in the abundance of things he possesses” (15).

The next challenge to faithful following of the King and strategizing our lives to serve the King are illustrated in this contrast of guarding our eyes. Jesus said this, “The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye is good your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness” (6:22-23). The figure of the eye is the portal for light. If we are blinded, no light can be seen or enter the portal. So Jesus says, if our vision becomes clouded by false gods of materialism and selfishness, our while life is in darkness and *we will lose our way*. But if we see clearly, our life will be filled with purpose and spiritual passion.

William Barclay states:

The idea behind this passage is one of childlike simplicity. The eye is regarded as the window by which the light gets into the whole body. The color and state of a window decide what light gets into a room. If the window is clear, clean, and undistorted, the light will come flooding into the room, and will illuminate every corner of it. If the glass of the window is colored or frosted, distorted, dirty, or obscure, the light will be hindered, and the room will not be lit up... So then, says Jesus, the light which gets into any man's heart and soul and being depends on the spiritual state of the eye through which it has to pass, for the eye is the window of the whole body. (196).

So, do we see spiritual things clearly? Or is our vision of God and his will clouded by spiritual cataracts or near-sightedness brought on by an unhealthy preoccupation with things? Our western influence and wealthy generation make it hard not to believe that it is true – or at least a big challenge – for many Christians.

The Two Masters (6:24)

Jesus explains that *behind the choice* of treasure and vision is the choice of Master. It is a choice between God and Mammon, a personification of material things as a god. Some, by their lives, disagree by believing they manage it rather nicely. Jesus says, we cannot. Men may have two employers but no man can have two masters. So, if we divide our allegiance to God with Mammon, we are serving Mammon and not God.

Though the sermon is not concluding yet, this powerful and pivotal point in the passage is, in fact, the climax or objective of the Sermon on the Mount. This passage asks that all-important question, "Who do you serve?" We often think they can have the best of both worlds – both here on earth serving ourselves with riches and living it up, and later down the road in the future, which would be heaven. In this passage, Jesus states: "**No one can...; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon**" (Ma 6:24). We cannot serve money and God; we cannot serve popularity and God; we cannot serve ourselves and God; we cannot serve our families and God. We can have only one master.

Jesus is once again challenging us to look at ourselves throughout the whole Sermon on the Mount and in so doing, He is challenging us to repent, to change our minds about earthly treasures and the things that we formerly served so that we truly understand what it means to serve the King faithfully and only. You cannot serve you and Him no matter how hard you try. One or the other will lose out, and in most cases, it will be God.

The Two Ambitions (6:25-34)

When we see the durability value of the treasure we choose, the qualitative value of the vision we choose, and the true value of the Master we serve can we truly appreciate where our energy, mind and heart should be exerted (6:25-34) - seeking first the kingdom of God – because today has enough worry of its own. That's how you do it!

However, it has been said that the most repeated phrase in Scripture is, "Do not be afraid" with some variation of it is used some 350 times. God said it to Gideon when He called him to lead Israel (Ju 6:23). God said it to Jeremiah when He called him to be a prophet (Je 1:8). Christ said it to the women at his resurrection (Ma 28:10) and to the 12 (Jo 14:27). Romans 8:15 says, "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father!"

When Adam sinned in the garden, a new word entered his vocabulary. He said, "I was 'afraid.'" Now man continually lives with fear—fear of failure, fear of success, fear of death. Fear became the norm because there was an absence of love. John says, "*perfect love drives out fear*" (1Jo 4:18). People's relationships with God and others are fractured. Therefore, people are constantly plagued by fears, which often inhibit their ability to love and receive love. But in this kingdom with Christ, where we seek Him and His kingdom first, we have blessing to overcome fear and worry.

Christ gives three examples of God's providential care in order to encourage believers to not worry but to instead trust God. He says look at the "birds in the sky," how God feeds them (26). Look at the "flowers of the field," how they grow. Their clothes are better than that of Solomon (28-29). This is visible to the naked eye; however, if one looked through a microscope, the rich complexity of color and texture would be even more apparent. God also provides for the grass, even though its lifespan is short (30). When Christ says the grass is thrown into the fire "to heat the oven," he probably refers to how the ancients would grab nearby grass and flowers and use them for fuel to further heat up their clay ovens.

Interestingly, Christ talks about how God feeds the birds and clothes the flowers and grass and yet we know these happen by "natural" processes. This reflects the doctrine of God's providence. This means God is not like a watchmaker who creates a watch, with the mechanisms inside, and simply allows it to run all on its own—apart from the maker's intervention. God is intricately involved in every aspect of his creation. Scripture says Christ sustains all things by his word (He 1:3). Everything is dependent upon God. He gives man life, breath, and everything else (Ac 17:25). Therefore, though birds gather their food, God is involved in their hunt for it. God is involved in the intricate processes of flowers blooming and grass gaining its color. Nothing happens apart from God in this world. It all happens in such a way that one could say, "God did it" (Jo 1:21, Am 3:6, Is 45:6).

The action of the birds to feed themselves reminds us that we are still responsible to work in order to provide for ourselves and others. Paul said that a person that doesn't work shouldn't eat (2Th 3:10). Christ's command to not worry should not create laziness or complacency in us. We should work, and work hard, as unto the Lord (Co 3:23). However, Christ's teaching should create trust, as we understand God's sovereign care for us.

Certainly, this is one of the reasons we often struggle with fear. We think God has left us, and we have to survive on our own. We may not actually think that most times, but our thoughts and actions imply that, when we live and act out of fear and worry. If we are going to overcome worry, we must have a faith that focus on the first things: the kingdom of Christ.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW:

1. Why store up heavenly treasures?
2. Practically, how do we store up heavenly treasures?
3. What crucial choices do we make in verse 19-24 that affect our ability to live free from worry?
4. Why, according to Jesus, is it foolish to worry about material things?
5. Does worry reveal a lack of faith? How?
6. How do we seek His kingdom first?