

Sermon on the Mount Class

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1. Beattitudes - Matthew 5:1-12

Introduction:

Matthew 5:1 says Jesus went up on a mountain side and sat down. That is why we call the sermon the “Sermon on the Mount”. It was common in Jesus’ day for teachers and rabbis to teach sitting down. Often our teaching today in church is done standing up. Teachers in class and preachers in the pulpit don’t usually sit but that was often how they did it. A lot of times the sermons we get in the Gospels and in Acts are like hitting the highlights. In reality a lot more was probably said. If you read the whole sermon on the mount out loud all the way through it won’t take you very long to finish. Teachers sat because they often taught for extended periods of time, longer than we are used to for a sermon or a class.

It calls his audience by two different terms in **5:1** – crowds and disciples. We often think of Jesus’ disciples as the 12 men who he spent the most time with but here Matthew refers to the entire crowd as disciples of Jesus. *1. What does it mean to be a disciple and how does that make calling the crowd his “disciples” fitting?*

Jesus begins his sermon with a list of 9 blessings. We call them beatitudes because that is the Latin word for “bless.” Some people translate this word as “Happy” or “Joyful.” **Read Matthew 5:3-11 replacing the word “Blessed” with the word “Joyful”**

List in two columns who Jesus describes as blessed and what their blessing from God is:

	Who is blessed	The blessing
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		

2. Who does the world say are the blessed?

3. *What does the world count as blessings?*

4. *Why is Jesus' list 180 degrees opposite from who and what the world says is blessed?*

Because the world surrounds us every single day it is easy to buy into what the world values. Here Jesus challenges the priorities of the world. He is saying, if you really want to be blessed you don't go about it the way the world does. This list of 9 blessings is Jesus' first clue as to what he is going to be preaching about in this sermon. He is going to take the world as we know it and turn it all right-side up again.

Let's look at these 9 blessings:

1. **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (5:3)**

5. *What does it mean to be "poor in spirit"?*

6. *How does that lead to dependence on God and that dependence result in a blessing?*

2. **"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."**

We know that not every sad person will receive comfort from God just as not every single poor person will be made rich in an earthly sense. People today typically grieve over loss but how many people grieve over sin and the terrible condition this world is in as a whole? It could be those are the types of people Jesus is talking about here.

7. *Why should the reality of the broken state of this world bring God's people to tears?*

8. *What comfort does God have in store for those who recognize just how bad sin and death really are?*

3. **"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."**

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Meekness is not weakness. Meekness is the ability to be able to exert one's power and resources for gain but decide not to.

9. *What does the world say one should do with their ability to gain things in this world?*

10. *Why is it important to Jesus that his followers have discipline and not spend all their time advancing their own goals over the well being of others?*

Jesus was the perfect example of this!

11. *What does Jesus mean when he says they will inherit the earth? 12. Why is it significant in light of their willingness to not exert their own power to grab as much stuff as possible here and now?*

Just like with the first two, this beatitude comes with a realization that depending on God for everything is of the utmost importance in life.

4. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

1. *How is Jesus using "Hunger" and "Thirst" as a metaphor here?*

14. *What does the word "righteous" mean?*

15. *Who is it who will fill them up?*

16. *Do you hunger and thirst after the right thing to happen, even when the wrong thing may seem more attractive? 17. Are there things you desire more than you desire righteousness? Examples?*

18. *Why is it impossible for selfishness and righteousness to happen at the same time?*

5. "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

We know that in life sometimes you can be merciful and get run right over...but someone will make good on this...19. *Who is the one who will show mercy to the merciful?*

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20. *How does showing mercy to others show that we understand all God has done for us?*

6. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

21. *What does the heart represent?*

22. *Then what does it mean to be “pure in heart”?*

Like many of the other blessings, this one is true both now and later. It is true now, those who live pure lives will have a clearer picture of who God is. 23. *How is it true later?*

7. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

God, our Father, is one who brings an end to hostility (See Ephesians 2:14-18). Being a peacemaker in the world is being like our Father.

Most of us won't be in a position to bring an end to an international crisis or war...24. *So what kind of hostility are we to bring peace to in our lives?*

8. “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

25. *Is all the suffering or persecution we experience a result of doing good?*

Jesus points out that this is suffering for the sake of righteousness. 26. *How might a Christians suffer for doing the righteous thing today?*

27. *How does Jesus' blessing make those things easier to endure?*

9. **“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”**

Notice Jesus qualifies this persecution with “because of me”...just like with the last blessing, this is a blessing for those who, because of their relationship with Jesus Christ, receive unwelcomed persecution and criticism.

28. *Why is it hard to really feel a blessing if that were to actually happen to you?*

29. *Is it possible that if we are really living out our faith that some people will find that offensive?*

30. *How do we deal with them in a Christ-like way?*

Summary questions:

31. *Which of these blessings did you need to hear the most, why?*

32. *How can we receive hope from a blessing that sometimes seems so far away, say we receive it in heaven, while our troubles are right now?*

33. *What would change in our lives if we really lived out our lives in the way Jesus describes as the life God blesses?*

2. Salt, Light and the Fulfillment of the Law (Matthew 5:13-20)

Introduction:

Before we can hear these verses as people who live 2000 years after they were spoken we have to put ourselves in the shoes of the people who first heard them. In this section Jesus teaches about God's people being salt and light. Jesus' audience were Jews. God had a purpose for the Jewish people to preserve the world and to be a light in the world but in many ways they had lost their way and needed a revival of their original purposes. Jesus came to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17-20). But before he talks about that he reemphasizes the purpose of the Law and God's people in the first place (Matthew 5:13-16). What Jesus is doing in this section of the Sermon on the Mount was getting God's people back to their original intention and purpose.

Salt of the earth (5:13):

1. *What is salt typically used for today?*

One of Jonah's favorite books is 100 ways to use salt. So there are a lot of ways to use salt today. In their day the main use for salt was to preserve food to keep it from rotting or spoiling. Jesus says we are the "salt of the earth." So Jesus is saying His people are to be a preserving element in the world. 2. *Who or what is it we are trying to preserve?*

In order for salt to work it has to come into contact with what it is trying to preserve. Can you imagine putting salt in the room next door to where the meat was being stored and hope it would preserve it? We know that wouldn't work. 3. *How can our contact with non-Christians bring about a spiritual preservation in their lives?*

4. *What does Jesus say it is possible for the salt to lose?*

We don't experience unsalty salt because we buy salt that is pure and in nice, tight containers. But in their day the salt could get so mixed in with other things that it no longer worked. There is Jesus' point.

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5. *What can get mixed into the Christian's life that might take away or dull down our saltiness?*
6. *How do we find the balance of maintaining our purity from sin and yet stay in close enough contact with the world that we can be a blessing to people and draw them closer to God?*

Light of the world (5:14-16):

God had always intended His people to be a light to the world (**Isaiah 42:6** and **49:6**). There God says the Jews were supposed to be a "light to the Gentiles." In the Bible the word Gentile refers to anyone who was not one of God's chosen people. In other words, Gentiles were non-Jews. Here Jesus is not teaching anything new. He is calling them back to God's original purposes.

7. *How is our faith in God and our belief in the truth of the Gospel a light to the world today?*

8. *Why does the world even need a light?* 9. *Do you think the world realizes it needs one?*

In **John 8:12** Jesus said that he is the light of the world. Here we see that we are also to be lights. When we provide the light of the truth in a world that desperately needs the truth we are being like Jesus. 10. *Is it possible to shine our lights in an obnoxious way?* 11. *How might someone do that?*

Or we can take it the other extreme and not shine our lights at all. Both extremes can be equally ineffective at drawing people to God through the lives we live.

12. *How are Christians, living for God, like a light to the world?*

As Jesus points out, lights are not made to be hidden. They aren't serving their purpose if they are covered up. 13. *Why or when is it tempting, as a Christian, to keep your faith hidden from others?*

Last, Jesus tells us two things: 1) how we let our lights shine and 2) what results come from it.

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14. How does Jesus say we let our light shine in 5:16?

15. What result does Jesus say this will produce?

16. Are there any other results that can come from living our faith out in the world around us besides bring praise to God?

Jesus, the Fulfillment of the Law (5:17-20):

Jesus is just about to teach on many things found in the Old Testament Law. He will teach on murder, adultery, oaths, and many other things. Before he does so he wants to make sure people understand what he is saying. Nothing he says is intended to undermine the Law of Moses or the teaching of the prophets (5:17). What he is doing is just like what he did in teaching that we are to be God's light to the world. He is getting these teachings back to God's original intention.

17. What does Jesus say he did NOT come to do (5:17)?

18. What does Jesus say he DID come to do (5:17)?

19. What does it mean to "fulfill" something?

While Jesus had come to establish a New Covenant (**Luke 22:20 & 1 Cor 11:25**) he lived under the Old Covenant. Jesus took those laws very seriously because they were God's Laws. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is going to remind us that many of those laws are still important today if we understand them properly. For examples, while we don't do sacrifices any more we are still not to murder or steal. We will talk more about this in next week's lesson. Jesus came to fulfill the law. That means he came to help the Law reach its intended purpose (see **Galatians 3:23-25**).

In verse 19 Jesus stresses the importance of obeying God's Law. Jesus doesn't say you are guilty if you just break the BIG ones – don't murder, don't steal. You are just as guilty if you break

even the smallest of the commandments. 20. *Why is it easy to rationalize that we must be alright with God if we just stay away from the BIG sins?*

21. *Whose righteousness does Jesus say one has to surpass to enter the “kingdom of heaven?”*

At first to their ears it sounded like Jesus was saying, “Imagine the most righteous people you know...you have to be more righteous than they are.” But realize the Pharisees had a shallow righteousness that was more about self-righteousness than any real righteousness that can only come from God and not from self.

22. *How can we rely on God to make us righteous rather than try to earn or work our way to heaven?*

23. *Does that mean obedience to God’s commands is unimportant if we can’t become righteous by our own hard work?*

24. *Why is obedience then still important?*

Summary Questions:

25. What opportunities do you have to be salt in the lives of the people you rub shoulders with every week?

26. How might you shine a light for Jesus into the lives of people who are looking for a better way to live?

27. Are there commandments that you have struggled with keeping for a very long time even though you know what is right and wrong? What do you need to do in order to submit to God’s will in that area of your life?

3. Murder, Adultery and Divorce (Matthew 5:21-32)

Introduction:

Just like with the beatitudes, Jesus is again going to turn our thinking “right side up.” The next few topics Jesus deals with point directly back to what we looked at last week in 5:17-20. Jesus came to fulfill the Law (that is the Law of Moses). Part of that means he came to restore its original intention that so many people had gotten away from. For instance, God didn’t just want His people to not kill people. He also wanted His people to love each other and not hate each other. Jesus is not disagreeing with the Law. If a Jew in Jesus’ day followed all the teachings found here he would in no way be in violation of any law in the Law of Moses. Jesus is helping us see what God intended the Law to be about in the first place. It wasn’t about outward obedience to a list of rules. It was about the heart.

1. Murder & Anger (5:21-26):

Jesus starts each of these with something like, “You have heard that it was said.” *1. Where had they heard these things said?*

The Law “Do not murder” comes from **Exodus 20:13**. It was the 6th commandment of the 10 commandments. Jesus takes “do not murder” a step further. *2. What else does Jesus say not to do?*

3. Was that teaching just for them or is it for us too?

You probably don’t struggle with murdering people on a regular basis but many of us struggle with our anger. *4. Why does Jesus put murder and anger on the same level? (See also Matthew 15:19)*

We know murder and anger have different consequences but ultimately they came from the same place in our hearts. Jesus’ point here is God wants our hearts and not just our outward obedience to a list of rules. We can avoid murdering people but still have a rotten heart. God wants all of our hearts so Jesus teaches us not to be angry with others.

5. *Are you angry with someone right now? What would Jesus tell you to do about that?*
6. *What else does Jesus say we are not to do toward other people?*

The word “raca” probably means something like “empty headed fool” or “numbskull.” 7. *You don’t really hear those words much anymore but what do people say today that carry the same tone?*

Our words can be like a thermometer of our heart’s condition. 8. *What does it say about our heart if we call other people names or shout insults at them? (See Matthew 15:18)*

Jesus uses an example in **5:23-24** that shows just how important being reconciled with others is to God. 9. *What did Jesus say they were to do if they were about to offer something to God but realized someone was upset with them?*

10. *What does that say about how serious God is about us keeping our relationships solid and resolve any brokenness we might experience?*

It would be easy to rationalize that giving a gift/offering to God is more important than making things right with someone. But maybe what Jesus is teaching us here is that it is hard to be reconciled to God or offer Him the gifts God deserves if we have angered others and show no concern for making things right (See Matthew 22:34-40 for the connection between how we love God and how we love others).

Last, some people believe that **5:25-26** deals with outsiders to the faith. Since we are not to take each other to court that may be what Jesus is teaching about here. Again, Jesus is all about making things right with others. 11. *Why do you think Jesus is so interested in how we treat others and our relationships with others?*

2. Adultery & Lust (5:27-30):

Next Jesus addresses the very next commandment in the 10 commandments. Right after the commandment to not murder is the 7th commandment that says, “You shall not commit adultery” (Exo 20:14).

12. What two things does Jesus condemn in these verses?

Again, Jesus is getting to the heart issue. It is one thing to say you have never committed adultery and quite another to say you have never lusted. Jesus says those two things come from the same place in the heart (Again, Matthew 15:19) and both are troubling to our souls. While Jesus uses a male example as the person lusting, these verses are for both men and women.

This is a huge issue in our country and in the church today. Lust does something to our hearts that is not healthy for our souls and is not something God is pleased with. God intended for sex and sexuality to be full defined through marriage and not through undressing people with our eyes. Just like being angry with people, lusting after people degrades them and makes them into something less than God desires for them to be.

13. Why do you think our nation is so addicted to sex?

14. What can we, as Christians, do to combat this...even starting in our own homes?

Next, Jesus gives an example of just how extremely bad and evil he views lust to be. *15. What does Jesus say to do if you struggle with lust? 16. Do you believe Jesus is exaggerating?*

Jesus is talking about “spiritual surgery” and is not advocating our removing various body parts/self mutilation. In doing so he is highlighting the seriousness of sin. *17. Why is it easy in our world to think some of these things, like lust, are no big deal?*

3. Divorce (5:31-32):

In ancient Judaism a man could divorce his wife (Deut 24:1-4) but she was not allowed to divorce him without going through the court system. There was a wide range of ideas on what reasons a man could give from divorcing his wife. Some held a strict view that it had to be due to adultery while others said it could be just about anything that upset him. What Jesus teaches in these verses really serves as a protection to the women. God didn't want the men divorcing them because they burnt dinner, leaving them to be on their own in society.

18. What did Moses say the men required to give their wives if they divorced them?

A certificate of divorce was a document that released her to marry another man. This was to ensure that he didn't come back and claim to be married to her at a later date. In some ways it was a protection for the woman against any abuse he might try. You can see that Jesus really had a heart to protect those who had little or no voice in the way he viewed and protected women through his teaching.

19. What did Jesus allow to be the reason for divorce?

20. If you are married, what are some things you can do to strengthen your marriage?

21. If you are single and think you may be married some day, how can you see yourself preparing to have a strong marriage?

22. If you are single with no intention of getting married, how can you be a support to the marriages of your close friends?

A note about divorce – Jesus is showing us God's ideal when it comes to anger, lust and marriage and divorce. None of these three things are on the "unforgivable" list or else we would all be in trouble. God has an ideal and Jesus taught that ideal but we all know people make mistakes and often the pieces have to be picked up. Divorce is a difficult subject for us to

deal with in such a short amount of time. Jesus never said those who have angered, those who have lusted or those who have gotten a divorce were second class citizens in the kingdom of God. As we know not every divorce is done for scriptural reasons just like every sin any one of us commits is unscriptural. That does not mean we are happy about divorce or advocate divorce but that also does not give anyone the right to be less forgiving than God is on this subject. We all want to see the ideal thing take place in each and every marriage but we know things don't always work out that way. We do have to advocate for people who are seeking God and seeking to get their lives back together.

Summary Questions:

23. Is it ever okay to get angry (See Ephesians 4:26)? If so, what would be some things a Christian might get angry about?

24. Where is the line between thinking someone is attractive and lusting? What personal rules can we have to keep our minds from crossing that line?

25. Are there people you know who had gotten a divorce who never returned to the church/their faith? What can you do to reintroduce them to God's grace and mercy?

4. Oaths, Eye for an Eye & Love for Enemies (Matthew 5:33-48)

These next three teachings of Jesus require a little bit of history to understand properly. Remember, when we read scripture we have to try to hear it like they did if we are to understand it for what it is really trying to teach us today.

Oaths (5:33-38):

1. *How would you define what an “oath” is?*

2. *What are some other things we call that today?*

If Jesus is condemning all oaths or promises then we have a problem because Paul used oaths at times (**Romans 1:9 & Galatians 1:20**). We know Paul wouldn't swear by an oath while writing inspired scripture if Jesus commanded him not to. You have to know how oaths were done when Jesus said this. In Jesus' day the Pharisees had constructed a strict system for making oaths. It got very technical in an effort to create loopholes to keeping your word. Here is an example of two of their oaths – If you swore *by* Jerusalem was not a binding oath but if you swore an oath *toward* Jerusalem was binding (See D.A. Carson, Jesus Sermon on the Mount, 50). This was not based on scripture. They made up this system and it was probably in full force at the time Jesus was preaching and teaching. In other words, they had a whole system that allowed and rewarded dishonesty rather than in all things trying to uphold telling the truth in all situations.

3. *What three examples does Jesus tell them not to swear by?*

4. *How does that information make sense of what Jesus is teaching in 5:34-35?*

5. *Why is there really no such thing as a small promise?*

6. *Why is it important that we, as Christians, place a high value on truthfulness?*

7. *What does it say about us if we can't be trusted when we tell people things?*

Eye for an Eye (5:38-42):

Jesus is not teaching pacifism as some have believed these verses to teach. Jesus does call us to be peacemakers (See 5:9) but these verses were not intended to address pacifism. In order to understand this teaching you again have to understand something about the culture Jesus was addressing. The culture in Jesus' day was a culture of honor and shame. In Greco-Roman society one was to seek out honor and avoid public shame or disgrace at all costs. This is something we miss when we read this in 21st century America but it wasn't missed by them. On a side note, this was also one of the things that made crucifixion so terrible. On top of the pain came public humiliation and shame.

So what does this have to do with Jesus' teaching here? A slap in the face in their culture was a shaming act. It was degrading. They even had rules about which way you slapped someone and how much shame different types of slaps would bring someone. A slap with the back of the hand had a different purpose and a different legal penalty than a slap with the palm. So let's see how this impacts how we view this passage.

8. *If someone was right-handed and they struck you on the right cheek, which side of the hand did they use?*

9. *If they struck you again on the other cheek which side of their hand did they use?*

A slap with the back of the hand was considered the most degrading and shaming. A slap with the palm of the hand was the slap you were more likely to give someone of equal status. So Jesus is teaching if someone slaps you with the back of the hand (right hand to right cheek) they have profoundly shamed you. Instead of fighting back and possibly further shame yourself, do something that really shows the perpetrator a lesson about your value as a person. Turn the other cheek to them and see if they will slap you with their palm. The message in their day

was...if you slap me again it shows I am your equal. It forces the one doing the slapping to lift the other's status and recognize their value and the shameful way they treated them with the first slap. It is asking the question, "Will you recognize in my life that I am to be honored more than you thought?" We miss that in reading it today but they understood it because this was part of their world.

We don't go around slapping people but we have other ways of dishonoring people. 10. *What are some ways we can dishonor people today?*

11. *How does Jesus' teaching here challenge us to recognize the worth in everyone, even people we get upset with?*

12. *Why is patience with others key in this process?*

This also has a lesson for those who are abused or insulted. One is, we don't let anyone else define our value. Only God can do that. 13. *Why is it easy to let other people set the value of our self-worth?*

14. *Where should our worth come from?*

Next Jesus addresses two additional situations in how we deal with those who might wish to take advantage of us.

15. *What two examples does Jesus teach about in 5:40-42?*

Two last pieces of background. In their world, most men only wore two pieces of clothing. To give both away would leave them naked. The point being, if someone is going to take advantage of you in court, doing this would really expose how rotten that they are that they would take everything you have and leave you standing their naked. This would shame the one using the legal system to take advantage of the less fortunate. The second piece of background

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is the custom of being bound to carry the pack of a Roman soldier one mile if they asked you to do so. By law, they couldn't make you go further than that. *What does Jesus say to do instead?* Not only might you surprise the soldier by the life you are living you might make him fear discipline by his commanding officer if they found out you went twice as far as you were supposed to!

16. Why is it challenging to live a life of self-sacrifice?

17. Why is it challenging, as Americans, to let go of some of our rights from time to time?

18. How might God be glorified when we are willing to live like this?

In 5:42 Jesus talks about how we give to those who ask. This is a difficult teaching and we get all tied up on it if we try to make the wrong point out of it. We immediately think of wise giving and foolish giving and how we don't need to be wasteful. The context of this verse is Jesus talking about living a life of self-sacrifice and he is using different examples to show how it can be done. Jesus' point is not that we get tied up on how we use our money. His point is, it isn't *our* money. It all came from God so God wants us to be generous people. If we recognize it all comes from God then we will deal with money in a whole new way. It is about the heart. D.A. Carson put it this way, "Christ will not tolerate a mercenary, tight-fisted, penny-pinching attitude which is the financial counterpart to a legalistic understanding of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." When confronted with opportunities to do good, Jesus is saying, we shouldn't constantly be evaluating it through the lens of "what is in it for me" and only give in ways that advance our own personal interests.

We have many opportunities to give. *How do you evaluate which ones to give to?*

How do you think Jesus would evaluate this?

It is possible to be kind and gracious and generous and still turn down some requests to give to various needs, groups, or people. In all of these areas, Jesus was the ultimate example of a new

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kind of living, living the way God always wanted us to live. He didn't just teach it and preach it. He lived it out (**1 Thess 5:14-15 & 1 Peter 2:21-23**)

Love of enemies (5:43-48):

19. How does loving and praying for our enemies reflect a godly life (see 5:45)

20. Why is it important for Christians to live exemplary lives in the world and not just try to be a tiny bit better than the people around us?

Jesus is not looking for a legalistic approach to greeting. The people you greet or choose not to greet can say a lot about how you view those people. *How can choosing not to greet someone reflect a heart problem?*

Last, Jesus calls for perfection (**5:48**). Jesus is saying God is the standard. It is not about being a little better than the pagans or better than another Christian. God is the standard and we, as God's children, are trying to be like our heavenly Father. God is not looking for checklist keepers with rotten hearts. Ultimately God is looking for holiness in our lives.

Why does our holiness require dependence on God and his mercy?

Even though we can never be perfectly holy on our own, why is it an important thing to strive for?

Summary questions:

21. How do all of these teachings not just teach us to follow a set of rules but actually challenge the way we view our own lives and the lives of those around us?

22. Which of these teachings is most challenging for you? Why?

23. *What would be different in your life if you really lived out what Jesus is teaching here? How would those around you probably respond?*

5. Giving and Prayer (Matthew 6:1-15)

These verses begin a new section of the sermon that includes giving, prayer and fasting (6:1-18). These three things have much in common. They are outward acts that come out of our relationship with God. Jews in Jesus' day saw these three things are pretty standard aspects of expressing their faith. What also makes these three topics similar is that Jesus deals with each of them the same way:

1. First, he shows us what false acts of righteousness look like
2. Second, he describes how the results and rewards are limited
3. Third, he shows us what real righteousness looks like
4. Fourth, Jesus tells us how God responds to real righteousness

Jesus introduces these three things in 5:1. *1. What does he call all three?*

2. What warning does Jesus give us about our motivation for doing good/righteous things?

Giving to the needy (6:2-4):

Jesus never says these are bad things to do. He says they are good things to do. But if we do them for the wrong motives then we missed the point. If you boil it all down, a lot of the sermon on the mount is about how people missed the point and Jesus is getting them back to the heart of the matter again. *3. How does helping the needy just to be seen or praised by others put the focus of giving in the wrong place?*

Jesus talks about reward from God or reward from men. Obviously it is better to be rewarded by God than by men. Even though we know that, sometimes many if not all of us are still guilty of doing things to please others rather than to please God. *4. What motivates us to continue putting our focus on people or things other than God?*

5. *Whose approval are you seeking? How often do you really seek God's approval for the things you do in life?*

6. *How might you actually go about seeking God's approval in any given situation?*

Jesus calls people who take advantage of false righteousness hypocrites. 7. *Why would acting like this be hypocritical? Why do people not like hypocrites?*

The word hypocrite comes from the Greek stage actors. Often one person would play multiple roles in one play so they would have to wear different masks in order to do so. The opposite of this is integrity...what you see is what you get. 8. *Why is it important for God's people to have deep integrity?*

In **6:3** Jesus says to give in a way that your left hand won't even know what your right hand was up to when you gave. Jesus is using exaggeration to emphasize the privacy of it all (**see 6:4**). When you give in private you are better able to keep control on your motives for doing so. Once you start telling the world how big your gifts and contributions are it is easier for Satan to creep in and start manipulating our motives. When someone is blown away by your generosity, the next time you give you are more wondering how impressed those people will be than you are concerned about the person you are trying to help.

Prayer (6:5-15):

We know we can give for show but can we pray for show as well? Jesus says we can. What Jesus is rejecting is a motivation for prayer that is based on what others think of us. 9. *What should be our motivation for prayer (there can be several)?*

In their day they had some opportunities to pray for show that we don't really have today. There were times when trumpets would blow from the temple signaling God's people to turn to the temple and offer up public prayer. You can bet some people made a show out of this. While

we don't have that same issue today we are still human and it is still possible to pray for show.
10. How might we be tempted to pray in showy ways today?

6:7-8 can be a bit confusing. Jesus first says don't go on and on praying and babbling. Then he says you don't need to do this because God already knows what you need. It boils down to their rationale for praying that Jesus mentioned at the end of **6:7**. *11. Why does Jesus say they go on and on with their babbling?*

The point is, God will hear us when we pray to him because God cares about what we have to say. Logically, it could be easy to say "If he already knows what I need why pray at all?" But as any of you parents know, there are many times in the lives of our children we already know what they are going to say or what they need but we still want to have that conversation with them because we love them. God loves you. God wants to hear from you!

12. Do you think we ever doubt those last two sentences in these notes? If so, why?

Sometimes we can get in a rut with the way we pray and just tell God the same few phrases over and over again. Can you imagine if your best friend talked with you that way? *13. What would you think about that?*

14. Why do we sometimes pray like that, saying the same few phrases day in and day out?

Jesus reminds us that God really wants us to talk with him in a very real and personal way. Starting in verse 9 Jesus gives sort of a "model prayer." He does not give us this so that we memorize it and mindlessly repeat it. He just said not to do that but that is what some people have done with this prayer...people are funny like that. He is covering the type of content that our prayers can also cover. We just need to personalize it to fit what is really going on in our lives from day to day.

15. What does the word "hallowed" mean?

When we pray we first have to remember who we are talking to. We are talking to the Creator of the universe! So we approach him with love and respect. 16. *What are some things we can say to God that show our love and respect for who he is?*

17. *What are a few types of things Jesus prays for in this prayer?*

18. *Which of these does God most need to hear from you?*

19. *What do you think Jesus means by God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven?*

20. *How do we contribute to that or distract from that through the way we live as God's people?*

Last, notice forgiveness is huge in this prayer and in Jesus' explanation to follow. In many of the teachings we have had so far forgiveness could play a huge role. 21. *Why does God link the forgiveness He has for us with the forgiveness we have for others?*

22. *Do you struggle with forgiving others? If so, how can God's forgiveness serve as a model?*

Summary Questions:

23. We can be really good at making ourselves happy but how often do we consider whether things are pleasing to God? *How might you be more mindful of God's role in your decision making on a daily basis?*

24. Do you think prayer and scripture reading would help get us more focused like this?

25. Is there anyone you know that you haven't forgiven? Does knowing that can actually impact the way God sees your own forgiveness motivate you to seek out that forgiveness?

26. How easily are you "led into temptation"? Do you resist or do you give in pretty quickly? Again, how can prayer and scripture reading get us focused and more aware of what is right and wrong?

6. Fasting & Treasures in Heaven (Matthew 6:16-24)

Fasting (6:16-18):

These verses on fasting end Jesus' section on Giving, Prayer and Fasting that began in 6:1. If you remember from last week each one had the same structure.

Label each of these parts with the appropriate verses in 6:16-18:

1. First, he shows us what false acts of righteousness look like
2. Second, he describes how the results and rewards are limited
3. Third, he shows us what real righteousness looks like
4. Fourth, Jesus tells us how God responds to real righteousness

All of these points: giving, prayer, fasting and where we store our treasures are about God. They are all about how we relate to God, how we prioritize our lives around God and our choice to love God and put him first or to choose to do something else with our lives that is more about self than it is about God.

First, notice Jesus doesn't say if you fast but when you fast. Fasting was much bigger in their day than it has been in ours. For many of them, it had become more about religious expression and piety than about actually spiritual discipline. In other words, fasting had become a way to show off one's own superior religious acts when it was supposed to be a means to draw closer to God.

1. *What does Jesus say not to do when you fast?*

The hypocrites would make fasting a big show. They would do it on certain days and they would dress different and look different. They would smear ash on their faces and make themselves look destitute. It was obvious they were fasting and they wanted you to know that is what they were up to.

2. *How does showing off really make the act about you when it was supposed to be about God?*

I like the question N.T. Wright asks of this passage, 3. *"The question is, are your eyes fixed on God or on someone (or something else)? What is your priority?"*

4. *Why are we so tempted to make other people the priority in what we do even over God?*
5. *How can we correct that?*

6. *What are ways we can use our faith for show or for our own advantage rather than having pure motives that come from a genuine desire for God?*

7. *Have any of you fasted, what benefits have you found in your Christian walk?*

Treasures in Heaven (6:19-25):

The section on storing up treasures in heaven gets us right back to the subject of putting God first and doing things out of pure motives. Jesus uses three examples to help us see the importance of seeking God and keeping him front and center in our lives.

8. *Jesus talks about treasures here...what things in your life do you see as the most valuable? Why?*

Jesus says to store up treasures in heaven. 9. *How does that actually work?*

That question is answered by all the other verses in chapter 6 about keeping God first and doing everything to please Him. 10. *Where is God right now?*

If God is in heaven and we are doing things right now that put him first (in the way we give and the way we pray and the way we fast, etc) it shows we recognize that life is more than about here and now. There is more to come – life here (on earth) but also life with God (in his presence in heaven forever).

So when Jesus teaches to store up treasures in heaven, he is telling us to use our actions to invest in eternity. 11. *What are some things we can do that have positive eternal consequences?*

In 6:22 Jesus says our eyes are a lamp to our body. Jesus didn't just change the subject here. He is still talking about having godly priorities.

12. What two options does he say we have with our eyes?

13. What results does he say each of those bring?

What is Jesus talking about here? The context has been keeping our focus on God and not on what other people think. Focus has to do with where we are looking (**Heb 12:2-3**).

We don't relate very well to walking in darkness like they did. They had primitive lamps to light their homes. We have electricity. But can you imagine driving your car at night and your headlights go out? *14. How important would having a good light seem to you driving 70 mph in total darkness?*¹

In the same way, we have to make sure our lives are full of light that will lead us closer to God. *15. What helps illuminate the way closer to God? (See **Psalm 119:105, 1 John 1:5-10**)*

16. How does God's word, the Bible, give light to our path/life?

Jesus starts with not storing up treasures for yourself on earth and ends this section with the possibility that some people have made wealth their master. Your translation may say "mammon" in 6:24. That word means money or wealth. *17. Why does our world put a priority on money over God?*

¹ this example is from N.T. Wright's book *Matthew for Everyone*, 63

18. *How are we, as Christians, tempted to do the same?*

19. *How can we resist the temptation to make worldly priorities our priorities?*

The main point in all of this is to focus on God and do everything we can to please Him. When we focus on anything else our world turns dark and we can no longer see clearly. 20. *Have you ever had a time in your life when the whole world seemed like a dark place?* 21. *How was focusing on God the answer?*

Summary Questions:

22. *What temptations do you face to put your primary focus in life on anything or anyone other than God?*

23. *What things have you found try to take the place of God in your own priorities?*

24. *How can we help each other keep our lives in check and our priorities on what matters most?*

7. Do Not Worry (Matthew 6:25-34)

In 6:25 Jesus starts with the word “therefore” that means that what he is about to say is the natural outgrowth of what he was just talking about at the end of the last lesson. Jesus just finished teaching about keeping our focus and priorities on godly things (which result in storing up treasures in heaven).

1. What does Jesus tell us not to do in 6:25?

2. How is that connected back to what Jesus just taught about storing up treasures in heaven?

Jesus is clearly trying to get our minds to be focused on God and lose the kind of focus that the world has. *3. What is the world typically focused on attaining?*

4. How does that lead to worry?

If we follow Jesus we will have much less to worry about in our lives. *5. Why is that?*

The world ultimately worries about having what they want. Jesus says we do need things but the person who is godly knows that God will provide us exactly what we need. If life is about the abundance of our possessions and our ability to attain and maintain all that stuff then we will have lots of worries. But if we realize all we need comes from God we will have far fewer worries. The pressure is off.

6. Why do you think the pressures of the world tend to result in more worries and more trouble rather than less?

The promise of the world is that if you get more things you will have less to worry about. 7. *Is that true, why or why not?*

8. *What two examples does Jesus use to show that God takes care of the basics? (6:26, 28)*

Jesus is making the point, if God takes care these seemingly insignificant things, then He will take care of us as well. The missing piece for some of us is **trust**. 9. *Do we really trust God enough to let go of thinking we can do it on our own?*

10. *Why is it hard to let go of control of things?*

Does it help to know that God knows us and what we need even better than we do? He also knows just when we need things and how to go about providing it. But still, many of us struggle with letting go.

11. *What barriers do you face to letting go of control and giving it over to God?*

12. *What things are you afraid he may not provide that you really enjoy?*

Jesus says “who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? (6:27). 13. *Have you ever found a good place for worry in your life? 14. Is there a productive place for it?*

15. *When does worry become unhealthy?*

Written by Matt Dabbs for the Northwest Church of Christ in St. Petersburg, FL

It sounds like the people in Jesus' day had some pretty basic needs – food and clothes. Most of us aren't worried about that. In this nation we throw more food and clothes away than some people in other places could even imagine. 16. *What things do we consider "basic needs" that really may not be?*

17. *How can we go about shifting our priority back to what is really important, a relationship with God and not stuff?*

Some people are better at having a relationship with things than they are with people. One of the best definitions for addictions is treating people like things and things like people. Our world has an addiction problem. People just want more and more and feel less and less satisfied or happy.

Remember Jesus prayer earlier in the chapter? 18. *How does this connect with Jesus praying for "daily bread"? (6:11)*

Verses 32 & 33 contrast worldly desires and Christian desires. Jesus is not saying we shouldn't eat or that a desire for food is bad in and of itself. He is saying that we should trust that God will provide and that is what the non-Christians miss it. They believe if it is going to happen it is because they have done it on their own, apart from God. 19. *Is there anything we can actually accomplish on our own or provide for our families apart from God? Why?*

20. *What does Jesus say we are to seek in 6:33?*

If we were really seeking God out we would trust that he would provide for our needs in what is more important. 21. *What makes it hard or gets in the way of our seeking God's kingdom?*

22. Do you think it is possible to seek God's kingdom in a half-hearted kind of way? 23. What might that look like?

Again, this is about trust. Trust God enough to seek Him. Trust God enough to know that you don't have to run yourself ragged storing up treasures on this earth or gaining or maintain vast amounts of wealth in order to impress God. God will provide. *24. Do you think, then, God expects us to do nothing but sit and wait for food and clothes to be delivered to our doorstep?*

25. How do we find that balance?

Summary Questions:

26. What do you worry about? Why?

27. How might you hand that over to God? What would it take for that to happen?

8. Judging Others (Matthew 7:1-6)

So many times in the Gospels it seems like Jesus switches to a new subject with little transition or connection to the previous teachings. It may seem that way here but that is not really the case. Jesus has been teaching about how we view God and how we view others. For instance, pretty much all of the previous chapter was about keeping God at the center of all we do and seek him out as best we can. That is right where Jesus picks up.

Without giving too much away, Jesus is still talking about who is at the center of your life and how that impacts the way we view and treat others.

1. What does Jesus command his followers not to do? Why? (7:1)

7:1 can be translated, “Do not judge so that you are not condemned.” *2. How is it possible that in condemning someone else we actually condemn ourselves?*

Sometimes we are guilty of the very things we see others doing but we are quicker to condemn them than we are to condemn ourselves. In fact, sometimes we are actually doing worse things than those we condemn and yet we pass judgment on others before taking inventory of our own sin. That is why in a little bit, Jesus says that sometimes people with a plank in their eye are judging those who merely have a bit of sawdust in their eye. More on that in a bit.

3. Why are we tempted to be extra judgmental against those things we ourselves struggle with?

7:2 puts God back in the center of the judging process. It is God who will put back on us the measure we use to judge others. So if you are harsh and critical and unmerciful to others be careful because God can use your own standards in judging you.

4. Is that sobering? How does that motivate us to be more graceful in how we view others?

What Jesus is NOT teaching:

Jesus is not teaching that in life we have no room to call things right or wrong, sinful or righteous. We know that because in other places in the New Testament people judged others and rightly so:

- 1) *5. How is what Jesus says in 7:6 a judgment on others? – So we see that Jesus himself judged. See also 7:15 where Jesus judges certain people as false teachers and calls on his disciples to recognize that as well (See Carson, 105).*
- 2) *Read 1 Cor 5:5 – 6. What does Paul's statement there require the Christians in Corinth to judge that man's actions?*

Making a right judgment is crucial in the lives of Christians. On the surface it seems Jesus is condemning all judging but that clearly cannot be the case because Jesus, Paul and others didn't practice that and call on us in other places to make judgments.

So what kind of judging is he condemning?

1 - It may be that Jesus is teaching against the kind of judging the Pharisees practiced. They often pronounced self-righteous and erroneous judgments on people (See **Matt 9:10-13, 12:1-8, Luke 7:39**).

7. How is it possible to be so critical of others, like in Matthew 9:10-13, that we actually miss someone doing a godly thing?

2 – It is important that we understand what the word “judge” can mean in their language (Greek). It can mean everything from being discerning to being harshly judgmental. Jesus is condemning the second and not the first. God wants us to be discerning of right and wrong, good and evil. There is a difference between judging something and being judgmental. **8. What is the difference between judging something or someone and being judgmental?**

Like the rest of the sermon on the mount it boils down to the attitude of the heart. Do we cast judgments that are constructive for the well being of others or do we let our hearts get so hyper-critical that we cannot see any good in anyone other than ourselves? **9. What is the difference between genuinely trying to help someone realize something is sinful vs. being condescending and judgmental?**

In **7:3-5** Jesus gives a preposterous example of what this looks like. A man is walking around with a bit of sawdust in his eye. It itches a bit and he would certainly like to get it out. A man behind him says, "Hey, let me help you get that out of your eye!" He turns around and has to duck because the very one who wants to help him get the dust out has a 2X4 coming right out of his own eye.

10. Why is that problematic?/Why would that be difficult?

11. What does Jesus say the one with the 2X4 must first do before he can help the man with the sawdust?

Before we pass judgment on others it is important that we take that time to evaluate our own lives and make sure we aren't just as guilty if not more guilty than the person we are going to talk to about an issue.

12. Why would you probably not receive someone very well if they asked you about a problem you had if you knew they had the problem 10 times worse than you?

Often, like a 2X4 coming out of a man's eye, our problems are way more obvious to those around us than we realize. It is important that we are humble enough to own up to our faults.

Some in the world see Christians as people with planks in their eyes. They think we are walking around with planks in our eyes but have our own sins and problems that we cover up. We have to make sure that we don't reinforce that stereotype with the non-Christians we are around.

13. Why do you think the world views Christians as judgmental?

14. What are things we can do that would actually reinforce that stereotype?

15. What are some things we can do to help them redefine how they see Christians and how Christians handle their mistakes?

Written by Matt Dabbs for the Northwest Church of Christ in St. Petersburg, FL

How do you make a righteous judgment?

1. We first look at ourselves and evaluate our own guilt before passing it on to others (See **7:3-5**)
2. Heart check – We have to evaluate if we are judging someone’s actions for righteous or unrighteous motives.

16. How might you judge someone with impure/unrighteous motives?

3. Approach people with humility. If we put ourselves in the position of being someone else’s judge we have failed already.

17. Why does someone approaching you humbly make you more likely to listen?

4. We avoid making judgments based on appearance alone (**see John 7:24**)

18. Have you ever condemned someone and later found out you didn’t have all the facts, you were wrong?

19. How did you handle that once you found out you made that mistake in judgment?

This teaching puts God back in the center of how we view other people when they make mistakes. We have to realize that we aren’t God and we don’t judge them as God does. We don’t reward people with heaven or condemn people to hell. That is God’s place, not ours. Once we start seeing ourselves as the judge to keep everyone else in line we run the risk of putting ourselves in jeopardy – See **7:6**

Giving the sacred to dogs and pearls to pigs:

D.A. Carson calls this teaching, “the danger of being indiscriminating.” What that means is that yes, we have to check our attitudes when we pass judgment and make sure we aren’t treating people unfairly or with improper motives, but also have to be an honest judge of character and realize that some people act like savage dogs or wild pigs.

Jesus is saying, if people are rude and abusive and violent toward you that they might not, in that moment, be the more receptive to the Gospel. Jesus is teaching them to be wise enough to be discerning about people’s character. Some people are just rude. Some are angry. Others are bitter and violent. That is just the reality of the world. If they hold God’s people at arm’s length because they are unsafe to be around the truth is they hold the Gospel at arm’s length as well.

20. Have you ever known someone who was so hostile toward Christianity that the door to sharing it with them shut immediately?

And yet we don't want to count people out or believe they would never become Christians. Jesus is encouraging his followers to be wise in their approaching and timing of sharing the Gospel with angry and ferocious people.

Summary Questions:

21. Do you have a tendency to be harsh and critical toward others? What might you miss seeing in their lives?

22. Is there anyone you know you feel you have judged unfairly or with a mean spirit? How might you reconcile that?

23. Are there some people you might be best to avoid for a time because nothing constructive ever comes out of conversations or disagreements with them?

9. Ask, Seek, Knock (Matthew 7:7-14)

In this section Jesus continues teaching about what God expects from his people. One of the things God expects is persistence.

1. What three things does Jesus say we are to do in order to approach God?

1.

2.

3.

Persistence:

Most English translations miss part of what is going on in 7:7. It can be translated like this, “Keep on asking and it will be given to you, keep on seeking and you will find, keep on knocking and the door will be opened.”

2. How is that a call to persistence?

3. Why is persistence important in how we approach God?

*4. Why does God want to see us be persistent in approaching him with prayer? (See **Luke 18:1-8**)*

5. How deep would our faith and dependence on God really be if we said “jump” and God asked, “How high?” in other words...if God responded the moment we asked for anything would that create a strong faith or a weak one?

Sometimes God doesn't act until he sees us keep on asking, seeking or knocking. Remember back in **6:11** Jesus prayed for “daily bread” that takes persistence, doesn't it. What must you

ask for the next day? Daily bread. The next? More daily bread. The point is, God wants us to be persistent in trusting Him to provide what we really need.

The way Jesus makes this statement it sounds like if you just ask God will do it, whatever it may be. We know that is not the case. We can ask for things because we are greedy, a new car. Someone might ask God for vengeance on their enemy because they are angry with that person. Those motives would not reflect godly priorities.

6. Should we expect that God answer any and all of our requests 100% of the time?

7. How does our motivation play into how God hears our prayers?

Even with 100% pure motives we can still ask God for something and not receive it. You would think if something was holy and right that God would jump right in there and work. Can you get more unselfish than praying for someone's cancer to be healed or for a life to be saved? But sometimes cancer remains and sometimes people pass away even though we prayed they wouldn't.

8. Have you ever prayed for something that was holy and good and it not taken place?

Why does that happen? Part of the answer has to do with God's will. Sometimes God has other plans, better plans, that are not immediately understood by us in our limited perspective. What we are praying for may be holy and righteous but not God's will for us (or someone else) at that time.

Another reason this happens might be found in the context of the sermon as a whole. How does Jesus' teaching on asking, seeking and knocking fit in with the rest of the Sermon on the Mount? In other words, if we took this sermon seriously how would it affect what we asked for, what we were seeking and where we were knocking?

Jesus' point in the sermon is to keep God in the center of our lives. If that is true in your life, then what you ask for, what you seek and what doors you knock on are all influenced by your desire to grow closer to God and to live for him.

9. What are some things God wants us to ask for?

10. *What are some things God wants us to seek (see 6:33 for instance)?*

11. *What are some doors God would want us to knock on?*

In all these instances we wait and see how God will respond. Often God responds in one of three ways: Yes, No, or not yet. 12. *How have you experienced those three answers in your life?*

13. *What are some things you really need to ask God about?*

14. *What are some things you are seeking you have taken to God?*

15. *What doors are you knocking on that you expect God will answer?*

Trust (7:9-12):

Next, Jesus gives us an example of how God blesses us. The example has to do with our relationship with God as our Father. 16. *Why wouldn't an earthly father give his hungry son a stone for food?*

17. *If God is our Father, and God dearly loves us, would he treat us harshly or provide what we really need? (See 6:11)*

This all comes back to trust. Do we trust God enough to ask Him for what we need? Do we actually expect God will answer? 18. *Has prayer ever become more of a ritual for you than a meaningful conversation of how you really felt or what you really needed? How did you break out of that?*

God wants us to ask Him for things but not just anything. God wants us to ask Him for things that lead to righteousness. We trust that the One who knows us better than we even know ourselves and knows what we need better than we do will provide!

The Golden Rule (7:12):

Other religions have had a version of the Golden rule but they state it negatively, “Don’t do things to others that you wouldn’t want done to yourself.” That is not nearly as powerful and godly as what Jesus teaches here in this verse. Yes you might avoid hurting some people but you are just as well to avoid doing good things for others as well. This verse is really a summary verse of much of what Jesus has taught to this point.

19. If we put God at the center of our lives, as Jesus’ whole sermon teaches, why should that result in doing good to others? (See 1 John 4:19-21)

20. What might make this difficult to carry out in some instances?

Summary Questions:

21. Are there things you stopped praying about that might be worth talking to God about again?

22. How might you be more persistent in prayer?

23. How might your trust in God, your perfect Father, grow to understand that He really will provide what you really need?

24. Are there any people in your life you struggle to practice the golden rule toward? How might you reconcile that?

10. The Gates & A Tree and Its Fruit (Matthew 7:13-23)

Verse 13 marks the beginning of Jesus' concluding remarks in this sermon. After all of the things he has preached on it all boils down to this – either you will choose God and righteousness or you won't. Jesus concludes his sermon with four sets of opposing pairs that all make that point:

1. Two gates (7:13-14)
2. Two types of fruit (7:15-20)
3. Two groups who claim Christ (7:21-23)
4. Two foundations/houses (7:24-29)

There are only two ways a person can choose in life. There is no third option. D.A. Carson sums it up like this,

“It offers two ways and only two. The one ends in life (7:14), good fruit (7:17), entrance into the kingdom of heaven (7:21), stability (7:25); the other ends in destruction (7:13), bad fruit and fire (7:19), exclusion from the kingdom along with other evildoers (7:23), ruination (7:27).”
(D.A. Carson, Sermon on the Mount, p.130)

This lesson will tackle the first three pairs.

The wide and narrow gates (7:13-14):

Jesus tells us that in life there are two paths. 1. *How does he describe them?*

2. *Why do you think Jesus says the path to life is narrow?*

While being a Christian has great blessings and rewards it is not the “path of least resistance.”

3. *What results does Jesus say come with each?*

4. *What is so appealing about the wide path that so many people take in life?*

5. *Why do people take the wide path through the wide gate even though it leads to destruction?*

One of our responsibilities as Christians is to help people choose life. We are to help them understand that the only way to have true life is through faith in Jesus Christ as God's Son. Many people today believe there are many paths to the same destination, eternal life. They believe Buddha or Muhammad or Jesus will all get you to the same place. It is popular today to be inclusive of all religions as equal/valid. Jesus reminds us that popularity and truth do not usually overlap very much.

6. How does Jesus' teaching here show that is not true?

7. Why should these two verses motivate us to reach out to people who are still walking on the wide path?

8. Who do you know who is living a life that is leading to destruction, would you be able to reach out to them this week?

Trees and their fruit (7:15-20):

Jesus begins this part talking about false prophets. These same teachings can also be about people in general. Jesus says that even though some people will try to fool us you can always tell if they are a sheep or a wolf by what they produce.

9. What does Jesus mean by someone's "fruit"?

10. Have you ever known someone who seemed nice to your face but really produced a lot of tension and turmoil wherever they went? 11. How did you figure out what they were really all about?

12. What kinds of fruit can people produce? (See Galatians 5:19-26)

13. How do you figure out what kind of fruit someone is producing?

Some believe Jesus is making reference to two very similar looking plants in Jesus' day (the buckthorn and the grape vine). They looked similar and had similar looking fruit but if you tasted them you would know the difference. One was useful and the other was useless. This is parallel to the wolf in sheep's clothing. They look like sheep but in the end they are destructive.

Jesus teaches us that if a tree is good it will produce good fruit and if it is bad it will produce bad fruit. What he is saying is that what is on the inside matters and while a tree may appear healthy on the outside you can tell whether or not it is healthy or rotten by the fruit it produces.

14. How is this true of people as well?

God is looking for fruit (**See Luke 13:6-9**). *15. When God looks at your life what kind of fruit does he see your life has produced?*

16. How can we make sure our hearts are spiritually healthy so we can produce the kind of fruit God is looking for?

We have to be clear here. Jesus is not teaching that God saves us because we produce good fruit or that if our fruit is good enough God will save us. That would be "works righteousness" and we know we are not saved by our own good works but by God's grace (**Eph 2:8-10**). In those verses in Ephesians, Paul lays it out just like Jesus does here. If we are in the right relationship with God, saved by His grace, good works will naturally flow out of our lives.

17. Could a non-Christian recognize your commitment to God based on the fruits they see your life producing?

Two groups who claim Christ (7:21-23):

This one is particularly tough to wrap our minds around. It is intimidating to hear God turning away those who have done spectacular things in Jesus' name. Often we put a premium on the amazing but neglect the heart of the matter. It is better to be submissively obedient to God in a non-showy or famous way than it is to do marvelous works in Jesus' name but have hearts that are far from God. Big, flashy spiritual moments can be shallow and empty. Quite, humble, and often unnoticed disciples who have done nothing spectacular (in a worldly sense) have often done the most spectacular thing. They have remained faithful to God without need of some intense spiritual experience to prove their place as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

18. Why do some feel the need to have an amazingly moving spiritual experience to confirm their faith?

19. Why is that not necessarily a true test of who is a disciple of Jesus?

20. Why is our current obedience a better indicator of discipleship than leaning on some amazing experience that may have happened decades ago?

Jesus is calling for more than a couple of righteous acts that somehow solidify our place in heaven. Jesus is still calling for what he mentioned in the very first words of this sermon, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (5:3). That is what we see happening in 7:21-23. Those who recognize their dependence on God have a place in the kingdom. Those who are caught up in their own ability or amazing experiences may not be as close to the kingdom as they think.

Summary Questions:

21. Are there areas of your life you have allowed to go with what is popular over what is right in God's sight?

22. How good is your fruit? Does it reflect a life dedicated to God or to self?

23. How much do you rely on God? Is God simply someone to call on when things are tough or do you talk with Him through all seasons and times of life (good and bad)?

11. Wise & Foolish Builders 7:24-29 (Matthew 7:24-29)

The Wise and Foolish Builders (7:24-29):

This section is Jesus' final teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. As mentioned in the last lesson, the preceding three sections were all about how life only has two options: Follow God or follow something else. There is no third option. Jesus has taught us that there are two paths people can take (7:13-14), two kinds of fruit people's lives can grow (7:15-20), two groups who claim to follow Christ and what determines if they really do or not (7:21-23) and finally two foundations people build their lives on (7:24-29).

This is where the entire sermon comes together into one last teaching. Jesus talks about two men who were building homes. They each choose a foundation and they each built. The final results of their work was determined by who or what they used as a foundation for their houses. Most of us know these two guys well because we grew up singing about them in Bible class or Vacation Bible School. 1. *What two kinds of men does Jesus mention in 7:24 & 26?*

2. *What does Jesus say makes the wise man wise?*

3. *What does Jesus say makes the foolish man foolish?*

4. *What is it about Jesus' words that makes it so important that we do more than listen?*

5. *Why is listening not enough from God's perspective?*

Some today argue that there is absolutely nothing we can do to contribute to our own salvation. They turn to verses like **Ephesians 2:8-9** to say that because we aren't saved by works there is absolutely nothing we can do to impact our salvation. If we take Jesus seriously we find out that is just not the case. 6. *What two things does Jesus say the wise man must do?*

You will notice that the storms hit both homes. They both encountered the same troubles, the same storms, and the same winds. The wise man's house stood firm while the foolish man's did not. 7. *Jesus keeps talking about houses...is he really talking about houses or something else? What does the house represent?*

Realize that just because you are a Christian doesn't mean that no storms will enter into your life. If anyone ever promises you that they are lying. 8. *What makes following Jesus so important to help us through the storms?*

9. *What kind of storms have you been through?*

10. *How did your faith in Jesus Christ and relationship with him give you a solid foundation to make it through?*

Jesus says that we have to build our lives on the right foundation, the rock. 11. *What/who is that rock?*

12. *How does Jesus serve as a great foundation for life?*

13. *Have you ever known anyone who said they were a Christian but it was pretty clear that they didn't pay attention to Jesus' teaching? 14. Is it enough to say we are Christians but not act like it or really be obedient to God?*

These verses are really about obedience. When we are obedient to God, it doesn't earn our salvation, but it does open the door for God to work through our lives in some powerful ways. Jesus even experienced this. **Read Hebrews 5:7-9**

Jesus learned something. 15. *What does 5:8 say he learned and how did he learn it?*

We don't often think about Jesus actually learning things because he was the divine Son of God. It might just be that the Hebrew writer is telling us it is one thing to know everything but it is quite another to learn through experience. Jesus suffered. He suffered because he was obedient to God. God calls us to be obedient just like he called Jesus to be obedient. 16. *What did Jesus receive for his obedience to God (5:8)?*

17. *What will we receive if we listen to God and obey?*

Again, we are not teaching that we earn our salvation but God does want us to be repentant, to be baptized and to follow Jesus Christ throughout our lives. God does call us to obedience and the only reason we can be saved is because, even though we won't be perfectly obedient, God will forgive us for our failures and save us anyway. That is called being saved by grace but it doesn't mean our obedience is no longer important.

Summary Questions:

18. *Are there things you have heard from Jesus that you have a hard time obeying? How might this teaching from Jesus encourage you to get that right?*

19. *Have you ever been in the role of the "foolish man"? What encouraged you to begin putting what you were hearing into action?*

20. *If Jesus teaches with authority (7:29) what does that say about what we are to do with Matthew 5-7 as a whole? What if something in there is hard to do?*

Lesson 12. Wrap Up

Over the last 11 weeks Jesus has taken us through some really challenging teaching. It leaves us with the question of will we just listen or will we actually do something about what we have heard. It is hard to remember back to everything he has taught in this sermon so let's mention a few highlights and then talk about which parts challenged us enough to move to action.

Matthew 5:

- 1 – Beatitudes: Jesus teaches us what kind of people God is working in and through. It is not always what the world considers the “cream of the crop”
- 2 – Salt and Light: Jesus’ encouragement to stand out in the world, to evangelize, and to hold out life and preservation in a world of death and decay
- 3 – Jesus clarifies several laws on murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, an eye for an eye and how we are to love our enemies. In each case, Jesus is helping us get back to God’s original intention when He gave them the Law of Moses. God is looking for a new kind of living and a new kind of thinking and not just outward obedience.

Matthew 6:

- 1 – Jesus teaches on several religious acts: Giving, Prayer and Fasting
- 2 – Jesus reminds us that we are not to do things for the temporary approval of men but rather for God’s rich and gracious rewards that are eternal.
- 3 – Worry – Jesus closes this chapter with a teaching about God’s provision for his people so that we need not worry about life. Instead we are to seek God’s kingdom and God will take care of the rest.

Matthew 7:

- 1 – God’s standards on judging: God does not want us to be harsh critics but wants us to be fair and gracious with others
- 2 – Ask, Seek, and Knock: If we approach God he will respond in the way that is best for us.
- 3 – Two options: The last sets of teaching are about life only having two options. Either we choose God and life or we choose something else over God and have a resulting judgment on our lives. God wants us to choose life and that requires both hearing what God and Christ have to say and to live accordingly.

How would you sum up Jesus’ message in the sermon on the mount? What was/were his main point(s)?

Of all those things, did any of it actually move you to action? What changes have you made or people have you talked to as a result of Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount?

Has there been anything that convicted your mind but not your actions? In other words, there may have been things you heard that you agreed with Jesus on and knew something needed to change but nothing really happened as a result.

How can we encourage one another to live the kind of life Jesus is describing in this sermon?

Do you trust God enough to submit your life to his care? What things get in the way of you really trusting God like you should?

Prayer time - Pray for the needs of the class but also take requests about prayers people might need to live out Jesus' words in these three chapters in their lives each day.

If there is time left over it would make a great time for people to be able to fellowship and talk with one another for a few minutes!