

HOW TO GROW

A Guide To Spiritual Growth Through The Sermon On The Mount.

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INTRODUCTION

The Sermon on the Mount contains the essentials of the Christian faith. If you need a starting place, if you are in a Spiritual “rut”, or if you simply need to be reminded what Jesus came to teach, this book is for you. The hope here is that believers gain a better, practical understanding about how we are to operate as Jesus’ followers, and that unbelievers will see the beauty of Christ through the lens of the Gospel. This is one of the most comprehensive step-by-step guides in Scripture that shows us how to grow and Jesus is the best teacher the world has ever known. Allow the Word to dwell in you richly as you search hard after His heart and His ways in Matthew 5-7. Use these 21 days to intensely seek the King. You will not regret it.

The Sermon on the Mount is a very well known section of Scripture. Many know its purpose and meaning, but available in these verses are some incredible things that Jesus spoke to His disciples for them to grow and mature as leaders and followers. Something we must remember is that this collection of mini-sermons in the larger scope of the Sermon on the Mount was all taught to His disciples. These teachings were for the purpose of growing the disciples and making them into leaders who would be used to change the world forever. These lessons and Scripture divisions derive from the sub-headings in the ESV Bible and are intended to be a topical-expository, exegetical study of the Sermon on the Mount. May these lessons from Scripture bless your relationship with the Most High.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Each chapter is meant for one day of study, and as the days go by you will realize how these subjects Jesus visited in the sermon on the mount move the believer toward growth and a deeper understanding of what it means to be a devoted believer. Jesus chose to start here, therefore, these are the foundational elements He taught His disciples.

Use each day to explore the subject Jesus is instructing about in that particular section of the sermon and take the opportunity to apply it to your understanding and your lifestyle. If our lives do not change in light of what God has said, we are fooling ourselves into believing we belong to Someone that we do not.

A good practice of believers is to fast or refrain from food or an activity for a certain amount of time and replace the time and energy given to that activity with prayer. There are certainly reasons fasting from food is not possible for some, but there are different things people can fast from. I encourage you to fast from something during these 21 days. Spend time asking God to reveal to you what He would have you fast from. Media, social networks, television, and similar activities are a good place to start.

SOAK

Chapter 1

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

Matthew 5:1

It means something that Jesus sat down and the disciples came to Him. This signifies that they wanted to learn from Him and understand what He was teaching. Apparently there had been enough they had seen and heard from Jesus so far that led them to hunger and thirst for more.

Today's assignment is easy. Just soak up the sermon on the mount. Read Matthew 5-7. Soak up every word. Read it multiple times if you want to, read the same verse several times if you have trouble understanding it or reread a section that speaks to you. Just become familiar with the sermon on the mount as a whole. During this time, pray that God uses His Word and these 21 days to dramatically change you.

The Point: Soak, familiarize, learn, and pray.

THE BEATITUDES

Chapter 2

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. - Matthew 5:2-12

It is safe to say that Jesus' point in these chapters is to show a different way of life. Everything Jesus says here is counter to the culture in which the disciples lived, and we today are no exception. Walking with Jesus is rarely a walk that makes any sense to the world. Jesus has an interesting habit of turning things around and approaching things backward, at least from our perspective. As we well know, it is our ways that are backwards.

The very first word Jesus spoke to begin this amazing series was “blessed”. The meaning of blessed in the Greek is simply “happy”. I would imagine that there is not a person on the face of the earth that doesn’t want to be happy. At our core is a desire for happiness. It’s the reason we spend fortunes on things that moth and rust destroy. It’s why we make all the plans at New Years to make sure that this year things are different and we can have a little more happiness. It’s the reason we give and receive, and love and do the things we do. We all want to be happy. There are 9 different occurrences of the word “blessed”. Let this word be the guideline for you as you read.

1. Jesus is so extraordinarily in tune with the needs of his disciples that he tells them “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” What more could make a person happy than to know that ultimately the Kingdom of Heaven would be theirs? If there is an ultimate happiness and joy available for people (and there is), then knowing what is on the other side of death is that happiness. But what is Jesus getting at? He is saying the Kingdom is ours, which makes us happy. But wait, what does it mean to be poor in spirit? Right now most of us are thinking, “I know what it means to be poor in the wallet, but what does this mean?” According to the commentators in the ESV Study Bible, the poor in spirit are those who recognize their need for God’s help and see their own “spiritual bankruptcy”. I would agree. The Greek translation literally means a “person of lowly spirit”. Essentially, what Jesus is getting at is: people not only need Him, but recognize their need of Him. The Kingdom is theirs.
2. Next Jesus gives comfort to those who have mourned or are mourning by saying, “Blessed are those who

mourn, for they shall be comforted.” This shows Jesus’ personal nature and care for each of His people. Something we must remember is that in this time there was limited medical knowledge and the average age was much lower than it is today the point being that there was no shortage of people who were suffering and mourning. As disciples - the original ones and us today, are obligated to comfort the mourning and as a result we are also comforted in our mourning.

3. “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” The word meek is derived from the idea of quietness and submission. Especially to men, this is a foreign thought. Everything in our modern culture teaches men to be big, tough, loud, and to make their own way without the slightest regard for anyone else. What Jesus is conveying to the disciples is the idea of humility. Humility is a forgotten virtue in many circles. If you look at most of the celebrities and famous people that are idolized in our time, a slim few, if any, are truly humble or show any signs of humility. Again, Jesus is describing His ways and it couldn’t be more obvious that they are incredibly counter to the culture now and in the 1st century. One of the most attractive traits in a person is humility and it is something we are to mimic that we see in Christ’s character. “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” - James 4:6b
4. We all have hunger and thirst built into us intentionally, and Jesus uses those cravings to show us that our desires and our basic instincts should drive us to righteousness. What does it look like to hunger and thirst for righteousness? Righteousness is simply “rightness”, or doing what is good and right. What would our relationship with Jesus look like if we

desired to do good the same way we crave snacks and meals everyday? For many of us, these cravings are always lingering, and I think that is the point Jesus is making. Doing good must be built into us even to an instinctual level.

5. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. This is similar to Matthew 6:15, which states: “but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Jesus again turns the idea of an eye for an eye around by saying that we are to have mercy on others. Not only that, but if we show mercy we will receive mercy. We are rarely looking for mercy unless we need it. Unfortunately, we as Christians are sometimes not the most merciful people. Don’t forfeit mercy for yourself by not giving it to others. Mercy is a good thing to give and receive.
6. Next Jesus tells us to be pure in heart because the pure in heart will see God. What an incredible promise! The Greek word for pure means something that is not mixed with something else. The pure in heart are those who are authentically striving for purity. Our striving for Christ must be a pure striving where we don’t mix the affections of our heart with anything else. Jesus plus anything is not the Gospel. He stands on His own over all things. A pure heart is one that is ultimately and solely devoted to Christ.
7. Peacemakers are not people we hear about much. Especially in a time when men and women are paid to get as strong as they can for the sole purpose of hitting another person until one of them cannot stand anymore. We should be careful not to bash the ancient forms of entertainment where people fought in coliseums to the death. We are not far from their line of thinking. Essentially, Jesus is saying that people

who are genuinely bringing about peace and working towards peace are the peacemakers. The promise attached to this is that they will be called sons of God. What an incredible promise and honor.

8. Now Jesus, in His foreknowledge, prepares the disciples for what is to come. When you are persecuted for righteousness' sake, remember that the Kingdom is your reward. He knows they will be mistreated, abused, and eventually killed for their faith. For us the promise is the same. Being righteous and living righteously doesn't sit well with people who don't know Jesus. Something to remember is that we cannot expect the lost to live like the redeemed. They are lost and will act lost. Dead people act dead, and this is the sad truth for those who are lost. "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." - 1 Corinthians 1:18
9. What happens next is similar in nature. Jesus says: "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." I think one of the most important words here is the word "when". It means that when these things happen we are safe in Christ. People can harm us physically and with words. The old "sticks and stones" bit is not true. Words do hurt. But Christ heals all of our afflictions. Another point in the when discussion is the fact that this will probably happen at some point. If you live the truths in the Sermon on the Mount, they are very counter-cultural and will create some friction in your interaction with people. Again, the lost will not behave like the

redeemed and as we know, people are not fond of things that are different or they don't understand.

Remember that these things lead believers to true happiness. Not just a momentary, fleeting happiness, but true and authentic, lasting joy. God really does desire for His people to be happy. Furthermore, even better than the happiness we can have here are the promises attached to these points Jesus is making. The over-arching theme is that if you put these into practice, then you are a child of God and will see God. This is not to say that our actions save us because we well know that it is by the work and grace of God alone. The point here is that when we are redeemed from our sin and transformed into a new creation, we grow by putting into practice the teaching of the most high. So be poor in spirit, take comfort in mourning, be meek, hunger and thirst for doing what is right, show mercy, have a pure heart, make peace, consider it joy when you are persecuted and the promise is that yours is the Kingdom, you will be comforted, you shall inherit the earth, you will be satisfied, you will receive mercy, you will see God! You will be called a son of God! Yours is the Kingdom! The reward is great if we know and follow Him.

Reflection Questions

- What is the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount?

- What is Jesus' purpose in teaching these particular things first?

- What is the importance of the disciples coming to Him in verse 1? (They chose to come and learn and submit to His teachings and His ways.)

- What does it mean to be poor in spirit?

- What is our responsibility to those who are mourning?

- What does it mean to be meek?

- What does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness?

- What does it mean to be merciful?

- How do we show mercy?

- What does it mean to be pure in heart? (To actively pursue purity and have a heart focus that is not mixed with anything else.)
- What does it mean to be a peacemaker?
- How are we to respond to persecution?
- What are some ways in which the sermon on the mount tells us to live differently than the world?

The Point: Believe it or not, God desires for His people to be happy in Him, so delight yourself in Him and His ways.

SALT & LIGHT

Chapter 3

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 5:13-16

Salt and light are two things that are very common to us in normal life. We have salt at the dinner table and at our booth in a restaurant. We use it to cook, to preserve, and to do many other things. Light is also very common. We expect it from the sun every morning when we get out of bed and we fully expect it to disappear every night. We use it in the form of a flashlight and we see it when sitting around a campfire. We use light when we walk into a room with no windows and when the power is out we sometimes flip the light switch, even though we know it won't work.

We use light, we are accustomed to light, and we need light to function. So, in every regard, we are very familiar with salt and light. The same was true of the people Jesus was talking to during the sermon on the mount. Jesus used these two things to make a very

interesting comparison to what we are to do and who we are to be as His followers.

It is also interesting that this is what Jesus decides to say directly after the Beatitudes, which, as we studied last week, are the foundation of His sermon, and act as the preface and introduction to the sermon as a whole. The Beatitudes show us what it means to be truly happy and truly devoted to Jesus in a tangible way. Here, Jesus transitions into the discussion of our responsibility as disciples. Jesus is showing them that the next step in this process of growth is taking the lessons previously learned (poor in spirit, mourn, meek, righteous, merciful, etc.) and making them present in their social life in such a way that people take notice. The Christian life cannot be kept secret.

Salt

Like earlier stated, in the time in which Jesus was speaking, salt was a preservative. Our modern preservative methods (refrigeration) were not around back then. So, they had to find a way to keep their food from spoiling and salt was the best way to do it. Jesus compares the disciples to salt by saying: “You are the salt of the earth...” Instead of being the salt of meat, they are the salt of the earth, meaning the salt to be used to preserve the people. To put this all together, what happens when meat is left out without refrigeration or other preservatives? It goes bad, gets stinky, and must be thrown out. And that is exactly the point Jesus is making here. He says the disciples ARE the salt of the earth. He doesn't say “you WILL BE the salt of the earth”, or “You MIGHT BE” or “you COULD BE”. He tells them the blessed truth that following Him is meant to have an effect on the people around them, and eventually, the earth.

“You are the salt of the earth, *BUT* if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.” Jesus adds to His instruction by stating that the saltiness of the salt must be kept in check. There are a few different explanations for this statement, but the one that is most popularly held and the one that seems to be at the heart of Jesus message is explained well by John Stott. Stott explains:

“The effectiveness of salt, however, is conditional; it must retain its saltiness. Now, strictly speaking, salt can never lose its saltiness. I am given to understand that sodium chloride is a very stable chemical compound, which is resistant to nearly every attack. Nevertheless, it can become contaminated by mixture with impurities, and then it becomes useless, even dangerous.”¹

It is easy to see Jesus point in this statement with a better understanding of the attributes of salt. If it cannot lose its saltiness, because salt is salt plain and simple, then the duty of salt is to do what salt does; preserve. Salt can't help but to preserve because that is what it is meant to do. It also adds flavor, which is an interesting discussion (*Hint to teachers). Therefore, Jesus is telling the disciples that they ARE the salt of the earth. Translation: you are to have a drastic and lasting effect on the people around you. Preserve them by teaching them who Jesus is and by teaching them the news that brings dead people back to life! The Gospel! Jesus' analogy here is so perfect in showing us that our responsibility as His children is to make other disciples and to win believers. Furthermore, our responsibility is to take the attributes

¹ Quote by John Stott with the help of chemist G.J. Hobson. August 1972.

we learned in the study of the Beatitudes and transfer them into our relationships with the hope that they also begin to display the same characteristics because of Christ's work in them.

Light

Jesus continues in the same line of thinking by stating: "You are the light of the world..." Here again, He is making a statement about who they ARE. This is not who they *could* be or who they *should* be, it's who they are. His discussion deepens when talking about the effects of light. Jesus says: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house." He makes a comparison to light and its purpose. Have you ever walked into a room and flipped the light switch only to find that the bulb is out. It's dark right? And kind of annoying. We are very accustomed to the immediacy of light in modern times. Jesus says that the light is not meant to be hidden. Light is meant to shine and be seen. There is no purpose in the light if no one can use it.

Jesus sent this analogy into the Disciples hearts by making the point that this light cannot be hidden. Translation: We as believers must be visible Christians. we cannot hide our relationship with Jesus, and furthermore, it must be easy for others to see that we do indeed have a relationship with Jesus. Why? Because it "gives light to all in the house." Why are we the light of the world? Because people need light. Otherwise, they are left in darkness.

I am so very thankful for the light I was shown before I became a believer. How much more should we be outspoken about our faith and pursuing opportunities to light up darkness because we have been shown the grace

of light. It all comes down to this. We are promised some amazing things in the Beatitudes. We will be happy people if we pursue meekness, mercy, righteousness, etc. Jesus uses these to show us who we are to be and how we are to live. Now, He uses them as tool for us to be salt and keep the world from rotting in sin, and for us to be light so the world does not stay lost in darkness. We have an amazing story to tell. You are the salt of the earth and you are the light of the world.

Jesus ends by summing up His previous two statements: “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” What is the point of us being salt and light? So people will see Jesus in us and give glory to God. How? By being saved. Jesus gave us encouragement in the Beatitudes and is now giving us responsibility as believers. Be salt and light.

Reflection Questions

- What is Jesus comparing salt to?
- What is the purpose of the salt analogy?
- Can salt lose its saltiness? No, but it can be contaminated.
- What are some implications given here that salt cannot lose its saltiness, but can be contaminated?
- What are some practical ways believers can be the salt of the earth?
- Why would Jesus be concerned about His followers living lives that showed others that they were devoted to Him?
- Like in the discussion about salt, what are some practical ways to be light and let your light shine for people to see your good works? The interesting thing here is: How do you do this while remaining meek (humble)?

The Point: *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father who is in heaven. - Matthew 5:16*

CHRIST & THE LAW

Chapter 4

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:17-20

It's no secret that Jesus ruffled a few feathers and said some things that can be hard to understand. This particular section of Scripture is no exception. Jesus is leaving no room for error in their thinking as it pertains to the law. He clearly states that He did not come to abolish it in the sense that the law was a bad thing. The law is a good thing. It was given by God for His people, and it still today, is a testimony to Gods righteousness and holiness. Jesus is answering a question that is surely on the minds of the people because Jesus' ways are far different than they have seen in the past. He came speaking with authority and the things He said were raising some eyebrows, especially with the Pharisees. The Pharisees have a nasty habit of taking the law and

transforming it into something it was not intended to be. The intention God had in giving the law was to show our desperate need of Him and to point to the ultimate fulfillment of it in the person of Christ. Jesus' coming is what the people had been waiting for.

The Law & Jesus

This raises a few questions for us today. How are we to know what to do? If Jesus came to fulfill the law, but not to abolish it, what are we to do about that? What does this mean? Ultimately, Jesus coming and fulfilling the law did change the way we function as believers in relation to the law. The law is good. God gave the law to His people and God doesn't make mistakes. Even the way in which the law came to the people was pretty epic (Moses on the mountain). God didn't make a mistake by sending the law. It was part of the plan all along. This being said, we do operate differently in relation to the law. We don't keep dietary laws and follow the 613 Levitical laws. Why? Because that is not our way to righteousness. Jesus did what we couldn't do, and that is exactly the point. The law was never intended to bring us ultimate righteousness. It is God's way of showing us how Holy He is, and at the same time, how unholy we are. In a thousand lifetimes, we could never perfectly keep the law. Therefore, there needed to be someone to pay the price that we could not pay and do what we could not do. Of course, we know that this is what Jesus did for us. So, by dying on the cross for our sins, He fulfilled the law. What does that mean to us? It means that Jesus did what we couldn't do and gave us righteousness and good standing before God. Paul put it well in Romans 8:3-4 ...

“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be

fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

How We Should Respond

A good question to ask is “How are we to respond to this today?” Namely, because Jesus said “For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

This is tough! Jesus tells them that He has fulfilled the law, and that not an iota and not a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished. He warns not to relax even the least of commandments and further tells them that their righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees. What does this mean? Jesus is showing them the new way that He has come to teach them. Christ came to put us under grace, not the law. This means that the law hasn't been made void, Jesus just satisfied its requirements for us, and therefore our response is complete and ultimate devotion to Him. We are made righteous because of Jesus and the Cross, not the law. God gave the law to show us our deep depravity and deep need of Him.

It was also in the plan all along for Jesus to come to us and accomplish something in us we could never do. Jesus brought righteousness to us through Himself. He became what the law demanded. If you are left wondering, “How can my righteousness exceed the

Pharisees righteousness?” Remember that our righteousness is found in Christ, not in keeping the law. Jesus’ point being that the Pharisees loved the law of God more than the God of the law.

Here are some helpful verses for reference.

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.” Romans 3:21-28

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Romans 10:4

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Galatians 2:20-21

Reflection Questions

- *What was the purpose of the Law?*
- *Did God make a mistake by sending the Law through Moses?*
- *Why do you think God sent the Law if His intention was to have Jesus fulfill it later?*
- *Why do you think Jesus is talking about the Law to the disciples at this point in the Sermon on the Mount?*
- *Since we are free from the law, does that give us freedom to do whatever we want to?*
- *Are you glad that Jesus satisfied the laws requirements for us?*
- *What should our response be after reading this?*
- *What are some practical ways to practice righteousness?*

The point: *Jesus did for us what we could never do.*

ANGER

Chapter 5

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.” Matthew 5:21-26

Just as the previous lessons have stated, the sermon on the mount is one unit. We are breaking it up into parts for the sake of study and making sure that we don't miss anything, but we must also see that all of these topics are very related and they have an even flow from one to the other. In the case of this lesson, Jesus has just completed His discussion about Christ and the law, which is a perfect, transition into this part of the sermon. The point of the Christ and law discussion was to show that He has come to fulfill the law that they could not keep in order to give them the freedom to choose righteousness.

Now Jesus is taking the discussion to a practical level and showing how this fulfillment of the law is brought to bear on the lives of the disciples. Notice that just before this section on anger is verse 20, which states: “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven.” This is interesting because Jesus’ point was to show them that the Pharisees, although thought to be the spiritually elite, were not actually righteous. They were in love with the law of God, not the God of the law.

Murder vs. Anger

Jesus is turning everything upside down at this point. He says He didn’t come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. He said that their righteousness had to exceed the Pharisees righteousness. Now he begins His discussion of the practical ways in which these are lived out. The next few sections in the sermon on the mount are essentially topical sermonettes that show how we are to have true righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. You might ask, how am I to do that? Good question. Realize that Jesus wants our heart and our devotion. He wants a relationship, not to be treated like the IRS where we approach Him with a list of rules that we follow to avoid punishment. He freed us so we could freely choose Him.

Jesus brings up the law as a way of explaining what he has been talking about. He mentions the Old Testament by saying “You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.” Jesus is making a connection between anger and murder. The interesting thing is that Jesus is showing them how their hearts are what He is interested

in. The laws focus was on what their hands did; Jesus is transitioning their focus on what their heart and their mind is doing. (Read Romans 12:1-2). It is a hallmark of Jesus' ministry for Him to flip things around and to show people that His way of thinking is very counter to theirs; this is no exception. He makes murder and anger synonymous. In the same way that murder leads to judgment, having anger in your heart towards another person is grounds for judgment. Why? Because it violates the righteousness of God.

Jesus is making a connection to the heart, which is a theme in the sermon on the mount and Jesus' teachings as a whole. No longer is the people's relationship with God qualifiable by how well they keep the law and offer sacrifice, but now it's that they have a living breathing and authentic relationship. This is a hard teaching for the people because there are now not as many cut-and-dried ways to "measure" their spirituality with something as physically intangible as a relationship, rather than their past rule-following.

Why start with anger? Well, we have to see the time in which they lived. There was deep-rooted racism in the hearts of the people, as well as animosity towards others for political reasons, though that is another lesson entirely. Anger means that something is out of joint in our hearts. If we are angry with someone, then there is something wrong in us. Some translations add the phrase "without cause" making the statement read: "everyone who is angry with his brother *without cause*, will be liable to judgment." Although it was probably not in the original Greek text, it does bring about a good point. In other places in Scripture anger has its place. For instance, God was angry at times. (Numbers 11:1, Mark 3:5, Psalm 7:11) Ephesians 4:26 gives some good insight by stating: "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go

down on your anger,” This shows that anger is a volatile emotion and is difficult to control but there are surely things that will rightfully make people angry, and thus there are right and wrong ways to handle it. Some might cover their anger by saying “I’m just venting”, but Proverbs 29:11 states: “A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.” Romans 12:18 sums it up well by saying: “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” This is not to justify anger but to see it in the scope of Scripture as a whole.

There are many different directions we could go with this, but ultimately Jesus is telling the disciples that their responsibility is to make sure that they are not harboring anger in their hearts for anyone. Anger is a direct lack of forgiveness, which we know is not what God intends for us. Our purpose is to love people, not hate them. If we are angry with people and it is the same as us having murder in our hearts because both are very destructive and against the righteousness that God requires of us as believers. Ultimately the purpose of God in believers is that they be free from anger and give forgiveness freely to people in the same way that He has given us forgiveness in Christ.

Reflection Questions

- What is anger?

- How does it differ from hatred?

- Are there times when anger is justifiable? (Eph. 4:26)

- What do you think Jesus' point is in comparing anger to murder?

- What are some things that make us angry?

- What should our response be to these things?

- What is the comparison Jesus is making to the law?

- What should our response be when we discover that we have been angry with someone?

- What made God angry in Scripture?
 - Why do you think these things made Him angry?
 - Did God sin by being angry? (No)
 - Is God's anger towards sin a good thing?
 - Why?

- How can anger be destructive?
- What are some warning signs in us that anger is starting to creep in?
- How can we practically deal with and combat sinful anger in our lives?

The point: *The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of god. – James 1:20*

LUST

Chapter 6

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. 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 your members than that your whole body go into hell.”

Matthew 5:27-30

If there is a sin that is a silent killer to many relationships with God, it is lust. There are countless sermons and books about how to deal with it and the dangers of it; nonetheless, many men and women are locked in a battle that overtakes the mind and destroys intimacy with the Creator as well as creating some tough marital issues. Jesus knew the hearts and minds of the disciples He was speaking to and even they were not exempt from the temptation of lust. Jesus is continuing His sermon with a few topics that are surely fresh on the hearts of the disciples. He has just finished a discussion on anger and its devastating effects. Now He turns to the topic of lust, and directly after this is a discussion on divorce and oaths. These topics are meant to help the disciples grow, develop, and mature as new believers.

What is it?

The dictionary defines lust as "intense sexual desire or appetite". The Greek word for lust in Matthew 5:28 is *epithumeó* literally meaning, "to long for, covet, lust after". This conveys the message that one who lusts covets something from the opposite sex that is unwholesome. Jesus, just as the previous discussion on anger, compares the law to His current teachings. He tells them that they have learned from the law that adultery is wrong. They were all aware of this fact, but remember that Jesus is still referring back to His statement about being free from the law. If their righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, then that demands some explanation. Jesus shows that anger is the same as murder and now He states that lust is the same as adultery. What must the disciples have thought at this point? Jesus is again, taking what they think and turning it upside-down. The law focused on what they did with their hands and their body. Jesus is showing them that being under grace and not under the law is about what they do with their heart and their mind. If you will notice almost every law in the Torah is tangible, meaning that it was qualify-able, it was easy to see and if there were a rubric, their lifestyle was easy to grade. The law was all about acting a certain way and making sure that every action, even the most minute, lined up with the law. Now, this is not to say that God was unconcerned with people's hearts in the Old Testament, He was surely concerned about peoples hearts and even certain portions of the law were indeed, heart related. The foremost commandment to "love The Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength" (See Mt. 22:36) was obviously, heart-oriented. Nevertheless, Jesus is now showing the disciples how to act with their hearts focused on The Lord, rather than their heart just being focused on keeping a set of rules.

Why This Topic?

Jesus uses lust for a reason. What is that reason? It's a huge problem. If you study the cultural climate of that time there are some very unwholesome things happening. The same is true today. It would seem that every magazine, TV show, movie, song, billboards, internet ads, etc.; are appealing to something in people and the outcome is very often lust. Internet pornography is an incredibly big problem. Just as an example: 10 years ago, 59% of Americans believed that it was morally acceptable to have sexual fantasies. Strange? Even more strange is that 84% of those studied believe themselves to be Christian.² It goes without saying that lust and the industry that feeds lustful temptations is a huge problem. The reason Jesus chose this topic is to show the disciples that it's not just about what their bodies do, their minds also belong to God. If their minds are to belong to God, they must be free of impurity. There is hardly a greater dividing wall between people and the Creator than a mind that is not solely focused on Jesus. It is easy to become double-minded, but remember a house divided against itself cannot stand.

Guys Aren't the Only Ones

It's a common misconception that men are the only ones that struggle with lust. The truth is, that is simply not so. While men do operate differently than women and men are primarily more visually stimulated than women, women are not exempt from this struggle. That being said, it is hard-wired into humans to be attracted to the opposite sex. It is God's good and perfect plan for people to marry and have children, but in it's

² Barna Group. (<https://www.barna.org/barna-update/5-barna-update/129-morality-continues-to-decay#.UvEaWnnJv8s>)

proper time. Just as school has a season, retirement has a season, t-ball and wearing diapers are things that only last for a season; so similar is the topic of marriage and sex. They are good only in their proper seasons. So, why is marriage part of a discussion about lust? Because lust affects marriage, even if you are not married yet. It causes young men to objectify women and in the search for a wife, they look for a body rather than a godly spouse for life. Lust makes young women do the same and have unrealistic expectations about their future husbands and potentially miss the man God has for them. Thus, lust is a dangerous thing.

What do I do?

It is a topic of discussion all over, and has been for some time. Matt Chandler, Senior Pastor at The Village Church in Dallas, TX explained it well. To paraphrase what he said; we have been wielding the armor of God wrong. Maybe, instead of just reciting a verse when we are tempted, we need to believe that Jesus is better. This is not to say that there is no power in memorizing Scripture, because that is surely a part of defeating sin, but that is to almost put the cart before the horse. At the most basic level we must know and understand that Jesus is indeed, better. Only Jesus has the power to give us true happiness and contentment and lasting gratification. (Which just so happens to be what people are looking for when they struggle with lust.) Jesus desires devotion from His followers and as His followers our lives must always be grafted into His ways, even when the world around us says and does something different. The point is this: Jesus is the only source of lasting and true contentment and fulfillment. The things lust promises are empty and leave its victims with nothing but guilt and a tough fought battle with sin.

Other Forms of Lust

Although, in this particular section of Scripture, Jesus is definitely describing sexual lust, there are other ways in which we “lust” after things. Like the Greek word translated into “covet”, in the same way, we can lust after things and covet things we don’t need. You can look at your internet browser history and probably have a good starting place to identifying some things you may covet. It’s interesting that even in the 10 commandments, there is a command against adultery, but don’t forget the last commandment which reads: “And you shall not covet your neighbor's wife. And you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, or his male servant, or his female servant, his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.” Deuteronomy 5:21. This more develops the idea of lust in coveting someone, but also shows us that our hearts are called to be devoted to Christ, not stuff.

This doesn’t mean you can’t want things for Christmas or get excited when your parents get you a good birthday present. The idea behind coveting is that you will do anything to get it and your mind is solely focused on that thing. It consumes you, your time, your attention, and your devotion. There is only one person worthy of all that attention, His name is Jesus. Jesus wants us to desire Him more than anything else. He gave His life for us, He is worthy.

Reflection Questions

- What is lust?

- Why would Jesus be talking to His disciples about lust?

- How did this relate back to Jesus talking about the law?
(Jesus, at this point, is still explaining His statement in Matthew 5:17-20)

- How does Jesus transform the minds of the disciples about lust by equating it with adultery?

- What are some ways to battle lust?
- What are some ways to safeguard yourself against lust?

- What are some non-sexual things people “lust” after?
(Ex: clothes, money, cars, popularity, etc.)
 - What do these “lusts” (sexual and non-sexual) do to our relationship with God?

- What are some repercussions of lust?
 - Will it affect your relationships?
 - Your future marriage?
 - Your relationship with God?

- Where are some places that Jesus makes claims about Himself that lead us to believe and know that He is better than what lust promises us?

- Here are some if you get stuck. These are some "I AM's" of Jesus in John.

1. "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35,48,51).
2. "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).
3. "I am the door of the sheep" (John 10:7,9).
4. "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11,14).
5. "I am the resurrection, and the life" (John 11:25).
6. "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).
7. "I am the true vine" (John 15:1,5).³

The Point: *Jesus is better.*

³ Excerpt from:

<http://www.freewebs.com/brucedurbinonlinescripture/7iamssofjesus.htm>

DIVORCE

Chapter 7

“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”
Matthew 5:31-32

This is surely a tough issue for many people. Roughly 40% of marriages end in divorce.⁴ Although it has been commonly said, “the divorce rates in the church are the same as outside the church.” This statement isn’t necessarily true. There is substantial evidence that those who have an active faith are less likely to divorce, although the percentage is still too high.⁵ Nonetheless, it is something we must deal with and Jesus inserted it into His sermon on the mount for a reason. Thus, we are compelled to take a closer look.

Why should we spend time discussing divorce? First, it’s a big issue that’s not going away, and if we don’t train people to have a biblical view of marriage and divorce, even when the subject matter is awkward, we stand no chance of making it better in the future. Another

⁴ <http://www.mckinleyirvin.com/blog/divorce/32-shocking-divorce-statistics/>

⁵ <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/09/25/factchecker-divorce-rate-among-christians/>

reason is that people who are unmarried need to develop a correct view of biblical marriage so as to set their minds on wisdom when approaching dating and other factors. Another reason is that it is simply in the text we are studying, and we can't just skip places in the sermon on the mount just because they may make people uncomfortable. As we have seen so far, the Sermon on the Mount is so counter-cultural and different from the world's point of view. But it's the way Jesus wants us to operate. If we desire to have biblical marriages, we must learn from God, the inventor of marriage, how it should be approached.

I know this can be a tough subject if divorce is in your family or if you have yourself been through a divorce. I hope the words of these pages and more importantly, the Words of God will help to heal you and not harm you. God intends for His people to live out marriage as an illustration of the Gospel and how He has taken care of His people. Let us look to Christ for the perfect marriage and model our own after His pattern.

More Scripture on Divorce

“To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife. To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they

are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates,
let

it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.” *1 Corinthians 7:10-15*

“And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” But he said to them, “Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”

Matthew 19:3-12

Is Divorce Wrong?

It is plain from Scripture that divorce is wrong except in the case of “sexual immorality.” It also states that marrying a divorced person is adultery. **BUT**, let’s be careful in villainizing this particular sin to the exclusion of other sins. Yes, divorce is wrong, but so is jealousy, unforgiveness, lust, etc. One of the biggest mistakes we

can make is to view one sin as the “taboo” sin that separates believers into different sin categories. We are all sinners, but there is redemption in every situation and the backdrop to all of these sin situations, (divorce, anger, lust, etc.) is the Cross. As Scripture says:

“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.”
Romans 3:11.

“For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,”
Romans 3:22a-24

What’s Really Important Here?

Something of monumental importance for us to learn is what God thinks of marriage. Since divorce is a product of marriage gone wrong, we should take a biblical look at marriage. Marriage is a covenant between the husband, wife, and God. What people often leave out is the idea that God is part of the covenant of marriage. Why is this so important? Because God is the ultimate Husband and our marriage is meant to be an illustration of our relationship with Him.

“For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.” Isaiah 54:5

The entire book of Hosea is meant to be a reflection of God’s pursuit of sinful people that constantly run from Him back to their sin. God uses marriage to show us His love. Thus, divorce is not an option for Him.

We are His bride and He will never leave us nor will He forsake us. (Hebrews 13:5)

If you gain nothing else from this study, remember this: God created us and knows that we will mess up. We are all sinners and as such we are very proficient at messing up. Yes, divorce is a sin, but there are many other sins we have all committed so don't make divorce a taboo, "unforgivable sin", because it's not. God is in the business of redemption and there have been countless cases of divorce that God redeemed and transformed to bring Himself glory. How? Because He is God and he is just that good. The point is this: Be very careful whom you marry because that is a very BIG decision because whom you marry bears weight on every area of your life. If you are unmarried, learn what it means to date and marry biblically now so you don't have to suffer the heartache of not knowing later. If you are married, love your spouse with the strength, power, and passion that only Christ can provide. This means: forgiving even when they really messed up, loving when they irritate you, and realizing that you are messed up too. Just like our pursuit of God, marriage is hard. It's not an easy road, but it is worth every step.

Reflection Questions

- Why would Jesus mention divorce at this point in the sermon on the mount?
- Is Divorce wrong?
 - Why?
- Does Jesus have a right to tell us how we should act in our marriages?
- What can we learn from what Jesus said about divorce in Matthew 5:31-32?
- What is God's purpose in marriage?
- What does God think about divorce?
- Are situations of divorce redeemable? (Absolutely!)
- Why would God give situational examples about how to handle divorce in Scripture? (Matthew 5:32, 1 Cor. 7:15)
 - [Because He knows that the world is fallen and we will mess up, therefore God (through Paul) gives instructions on how to handle it.]

The Point: *God loves marriage.
Our relationship with Him is the ultimate marriage.*

OATHS

Chapter 8

“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.”

Matthew 5:33-37

Have you ever stretched the truth a little bit? Have you ever made an excuse for your lie? Have you ever believed a lie you told yourself? We can be very convincing in justifying what we know we shouldn't do. Like the previous examples Jesus has in His sermon, He points back to the law by saying that they had heard from the days of old, meaning that they thought one way and Jesus was about to transform their way of thinking. He takes the law and shows that it is supposed to point to a condition of their heart. Instead of making sure that you just don't lie, make sure that you are a person of your word. A good synonym here is integrity. It's a character issue, and as a character issue, it fits very well into this section of the sermon on the mount. Although, Jesus didn't come to preach morality, He came to save the

world; He does indeed have standards for His people that are intended for their good.

What is Integrity?

The Dictionary defines Integrity as “the quality of being honest and fair; the state of being complete or whole.”⁶ Integrity at the most basic level is us doing what we say we are going to do. This takes humility because to be completely honest sometimes exposes our weaknesses we sometimes try to cover by telling little “white lies.” For example; when a parent asks their high schooler, “how are your grades?” The high schooler may respond, “They are doing good.” The problem is that the student knows that she just bombed a test and although she doesn’t know what her final grade will be, she knows what the term “good” means, and she is covering to avoid consequence. This is the biggest contributor to our dishonesty problem: consequence avoidance.

Yes and No

Something that should define all believers is honesty. It tells much about our character if we are completely or partially true in our speech. Remember Ananias and Saphirra? They brought the money in from the property they sold, but lied to God about the amount because they had held some back. The problem wasn’t that they kept some money, because it was their land to sell. The problem was that they lied to God about it. God took it so seriously that He ended their lives that day.

Something that should separate believers from the world is their honesty. Jesus told the people listening to Him, that their yes should be yes and their no should be no. If we need to swear by something, that means that we need to adopt trust from something else to replace the

⁶<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/integrity>

trust we have not earned. Are you completely honest with your spouse? About everything? Are your business deals filled with integrity? Or are there a few grey areas? How do you deal with your parents or children? Are you completely honest, or do you bend the truth to make yourself look better?

What this all boils down to is that we are consumed with what people think about us. The only reason to lie is to avoid consequence or to make our situation look better to other people. We seem to have the Facebook complex. We look at social media where people only post happy things. Everyone seems so happy on Facebook, Instagram, and at church. Then we might look at our life and ask, “why am I not as happy as they are? What’s wrong with me and my life?” This leads us to make the problem worse by lying about our current state by trying to impress people with what we have. This sometimes even bleeds over into other areas of our life like the way we speak about other people. Maybe to shift the attention from our problems, we zero-in on someone else’s issues and use them to distract people from the obvious issues in our own life. Wherever we find ourselves in this process, we must realize that anything short of the complete truth is a lie. Remember who the father of lies is? Don’t forget that every time we even slightly bend the truth, we are doing exactly what the evil one wants us to do. His tricks are old, but they still work. That forked tongue that whispered in Eve’s ear “You will not surely die”, still slithers its way into our minds and tempts us to disguise the truth to our spouse. It tempts us to forget a few details that need to be disclosed. We find so many ways to twist it, but truth is truth, and Jesus meant what He said when He promised us that it will set us free. Truth is freedom, lies are chains. Remember, anything more than yes and no comes from evil.

Reflection Questions

- When was the last time you lied?
- What was the reason?
- How can you retrain your mind to gravitate towards truth, and not stretching the truth?
- What are some complications that result from lies?
- What benefits are there from being completely honest?
- Why would this be something Jesus cares about?
- How has dishonesty divided your relationship with God?

The Point: *Lies are chains, truth is freedom from them.*

RETALIATION

Chapter 9

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.”

Matthew 5:38-42

It takes a lot of effort to forgive people inwardly, but outwardly is even a more difficult endeavor. To do something for someone that has wronged you is surely a tough task. This is where the water meets the wheel, and humility meets the Christian life. There is hardly a more humble act than to consider someone better than yourself by ministering to them after they have wronged you.

If you were raised with parents like mine, they told you as a child: “If someone punches you, you punch them back!” It sounded like sound advice to me as a young child. Luckily I never had to use it; probably because I was always twice the size of pretty much everyone else until middle school. Parents are just concerned about their child being safe and that’s understandable. Yet, when we grow older, Jesus takes our notions of safety and health to another place. He tells us to be mindful of the wellbeing of others, even those who wrong us. How

backwards from our current culture does this seem? But what an amazing mark it would leave on someone.

How Jesus Operates

Jesus tells the people not to resist evil people and to do what people ask of them. Can you imagine if someone were to mistreat you or do something wrong to you and then they come up needing something and you, the person they wronged, were to step to the plate and help them. What an amazing message about what you believe. This is the essence of the Gospel. The Gospel is about forgiveness and redemption. We never deserved Jesus to give His pure blood for us so we could live, so we are called to reciprocate and illustrate this love in how we treat and forgive others.

This also helps us in our conversations about people. Where we might have once criticized someone, these verses beg the question in our heart of how we can help those who have wronged us. It shouldn't take much effort to think of someone that has wronged us or that we simply don't get along with. What would happen if you began to serve them instead of being bitter towards them. What if you began to pray that God would bless them and their family instead of talking about them to other people? One of the most liberating feelings I have ever felt is when I began to pray for people that I have been wronged by. Something amazing happened. God began to melt away the bitterness in me, I realized how that bitterness was me living in sin, my relationship with Him reached new heights, and I began to care about the people I was once bitter towards. This is the great Gospel. God, the most high, sends His innocent Son as the payment for a bill that evil people are indebted to that they could never pay. Jesus uses His sinless blood, which is completely foreign to this world, and pays the check for

people who don't deserve it. That's why we don't retaliate. Jesus didn't. He gave Himself and not a temper. He healed when He could have destroyed. He gave life when He could have brought death. What great wisdom resides in the mind of Christ. I'm so glad Jesus doesn't think or act like we do. To Him and His Name be glory and honor forever for the great things He has done.

This is Philippians 2:1-11. Let these words sink deep into your heart.

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Reflection Questions

- Why would Jesus not want us to retaliate?
- How does forgiveness change us?
- How does forgiveness change our situations?
- How does forgiveness change the way people see us?
- How is this reflective of the Gospel?
- What are some situations or people that need your attention when it comes to forgiveness and retaliation?
- How can you train your mind to default to forgiveness and not retaliation?

The Point: *Reflect the forgiveness of Christ in your life.*

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Chapter 10

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Matthew 5:43-48

If there is a place that we as Christians mess up, it's in the area of loving people that are considered our enemies. There are simply going to be people in life that don't like you. Plain and simple. Sometimes we give them a reason and sometimes, there is no reason at all. Yet, Scripture is very clear about how we are to treat people who are our “enemies.”

How This Relates to The Law

Discussion

Jesus is continuing His discussion about the law in that He says, “You have heard it said...” He has said this a few times now and His point is still the same overall: Do what is right with your heart, not just your hands. Jesus is still transferring the disciples’ thought about holiness from the law, which they are doing with their hands, to their heart. All of these things are heart issues. He ends this chapter with probably the toughest lesson yet. Love people, and not just any people, but the ones who don’t like you. It sounds much like the beginning of this sermon when Jesus told the disciples that they are blessed if they are persecuted for His name’s sake. His point is to show them that there has to be more to their faith than being kind to those people that like them, otherwise, how else can the lost know Jesus?

Why?

He not only tells the disciples to love their enemies, which surely is hard enough, but He tells them to pray for those who persecute them. Pray for them. Wow! It’s hard to pray to begin with, so how can we pray for those who hate us? The point here is that praying for someone helps us get past our anger and see in them what God sees. It’s very hard to genuinely pray for someone and still feel the same degree of anger towards them afterwards. Jesus is so insightful in telling the disciples this for several reasons. One reason is that they, like us, are to show love to people because lost people need the Gospel and the grace of God. Another reason is that the disciples were going to be persecuted, and Jesus knew this. Loving our enemies is something for our enemies to benefit from, but not only that; we are drawn closer to Christ in relationship when we do what He says

and love as He loves. We all love the popular song “How He Loves”, and we all could probably agree that God is a loving God, but how are you loving people? What evidence is there in you that you love the unlovable? What are specific ways you are loving people that don’t love you?

How?

Something we must answer is the question: How? How are we to love the unlovable and the people that don’t love us? The answer is simple but hard to put into practice. Serve them. When we transfer our relationships with our enemies from strife to service we are going to learn to forgive. If we have an enemy, there is apparently something in our past with that person that has caused a fracture in that relationship. Part of the problem is us, and we cannot miss this. If we harbor unforgiveness in our hearts towards people, we are outside of the will of God. Part of God’s good and perfect plan is for us to serve our enemies by praying for them, and by praying for them we realize that we are to forgive and have a genuine concern for their wellbeing. The crazy part about this is that we are unable to do this on our own. This seems impossible because it is! Only someone with the grace of Christ in them can love people that hate them and that is the beautiful part about the sermon on the mount. These counter cultural ideas and commands from Jesus are only possible with His Spirit and Power in us. If you want to know how to love your enemies with a true and authentic, Christ-honoring love, then begin to pray that Jesus will show you how and that His Spirit and love would flow through you to the people in your life that you have broken relationships with.

What is the purpose in all of this? Jesus has many things to say about how we live, especially in the sermon

on the mount. These teachings are counter cultural and very different from what the world would lead us to believe. Like verse 48 tells us, we are to strive for the perfection we see in Christ. We all have enemies. Let's start loving them and see if things begin to change.

Reflection Questions

- Why would He care that His people love other people?
- What makes this an important topic for the disciples?
(Remember that most of them would later be martyred.)
- What does it mean to truly love someone?
- Why would Jesus be concerned with you loving them?
- How can, not loving an enemy damage your relationship with God?
- How often do you pray for the people that wrong you?

The Point: *Love people. Even the ones you don't like.*

GIVING & HUMILITY

Chapter 11

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” - Matthew 6:1-4

It seems that every time someone mentions giving to the needy we cringe because we either know that we haven't done as Scripture demands or we see in us a disdain for that type of action. The point here is not just giving things away but realizing that what we have is given by God and, for us, only borrowed for a short time. This is all tied to the necessity for humility in the believer because arrogance is something that is not glorifying to God, namely because it assumes we should receive some credit for what God does through us.

Why This Topic?

Jesus' point in telling the disciples this about not practicing righteousness for others to see negates the action. If we do good things to be seen by people, then

how is that something we do with a pure heart? It isn't. If we do good things to be seen by people our motive isn't that Jesus wants us to, it's that we want some respect from people or for people to think of us more than they should. It takes a lot of humility to pursue God when no one can see it. But what greater testimony to our faith than to pursue God and do what He says, even when we don't get a pat on the back from someone because of it. It's a sign of true devotion.

This was a response on Jesus' part to the way the Pharisees, Jesus calls hypocrites, used their righteousness to gain respect from people. Jesus tells the disciples that humility is what pleases God. Again, these things in the sermon on the mount are all matters of the heart. The Pharisees were only concerned with what they could do with their hands and Jesus was much more concerned with what they did with their hearts. Jesus could see their hearts and He sees it is more important to focus on what happens inside of us, because what happens inside will surely come out of us. This is the crux of the matter as far as our actions go. If our hearts are corrupt, then our actions will be corrupt, without exception. Like Scripture says, "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Matthew 6:22-23) If your heart is bad, your actions cannot be pure because they will always have a corrupt motive. Jesus wants your heart, not empty actions.

WHEN You Give

It's also interesting that Jesus said "So WHEN you give to the needy..." the point here is not just giving to the needy, it's just an example Jesus is giving and he

approaches it as if it's a given in their behavior. He doesn't say IF you give, He says WHEN you give. He is telling them that whatever they do: giving to the needy, ministering to people, healing people, praying for people, and a lot of other things, their heart must be in the right place. The point is that it can't be from selfish motives.

There is a certain expectation upon believers and we can't neglect this. There are requirements on us from God through Scripture, even the natural way we know a certain level of right from wrong is put in us from God and when we become slaves of sin we lose touch with the ways that God teaches us to operate in His world. He says something a little scary. He tells the disciples that the hypocrites "have received their reward in full." Meaning that they have received what they wanted, which was the attention and praise of men, but they didn't pursue the approval of God in their actions, which lead them to be self-centered people. There are some very profound implications for us today from these verses. How many things do you do, even at church, to be seen by people? Which of your desires are truly pure? All of them? Some? Few? Maybe none? It's a humbling thought that our motivation should be pure. We can't behave in such a way that our goal is to be seen by people.

What Does All This Mean?

So WHEN you give, or when you help someone, or when you stand up for someone, or when you choose not to do what everyone else is doing, make sure that your heart is right. The righteousness is expected, the outward signs should be obvious, but how is your heart doing? What do you think about when you think of living righteously? Is it because people will see you or is it that Jesus is pleased with your righteousness and you will be happier in Him? Like John Piper says: "He is most

glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in Him.” The point is that Jesus is looking at your heart. Thus we need to examine our hearts. It’s hard to pinpoint our motives because we are often blind to our own shortcomings in regard to our relationship with God. Spend time asking God to point out the things in your heart that don’t belong. Ultimately, nothing but Him and things devoted to Him belong anyway. When it comes to righteousness and pureness of heart it’s not an either-or relationship, it’s a both-and relationship.

Reflection Questions

- What is humility?
- What is righteousness?
- Why are these important to God?
- Why would God care about what's in your heart and not just what you do?
- What are some signs that a person has actions but no heart devotion to God?
- What do you think Jesus was trying to get across to the disciples in this passage?
- Would it be easier if God only looked at our actions and not our hearts?
- What are some outward signs of devotion to God?
 - Why are these also important?
- Because of these verses, what does God require from you as a believer?

The Point: *Be righteous with a pure heart.*

PRAYER & HUMILITY

Chapter 12

“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.

And your Father who sees in secret will reward

you. “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” - Matthew 6:5-14

Jesus continues His discussion about being authentic and not like the hypocrites by showing the disciples how to pray. It’s interesting that the disciples didn’t have to ask, as far as we know. Jesus just told them. It’s obvious from this passage that prayer is not just important, but it’s necessary. It’s also a matter of the

heart, just like last weeks topic about giving to the needy. There are certain things that are simply natural to the believer. Like a dog naturally runs after cars, barks, wags his tail, etc. People who are saved by Jesus do certain things naturally like giving to the needy, praying, living humbly, being kind to people, loving everyone, etc. The point is not only prayer, but it's how we pray and our motives in prayer. It's a heart issue, not just an action issue.

Praying With the Right Heart

This so closely mirrors the previous discussion about giving to the needy that Jesus even uses the same phrase: "Don't be like the hypocrites." It's a big deal that Jesus is calling certain people hypocrites. He goes so far as to say that they think they will be heard for their many words. Apparently the condition of our heart and our motives when we pray are very important to the One we are praying to. Jesus is showing the hypocrisy in the people that pray for the purpose of people hearing their prayers. Essentially their point is that they will be seen as a holy person by how "well" they pray or by all the words they use. It would be like you talking to your friend super loud in public and telling them how much you love them and are thankful for them for the sole purpose of people hearing you say it to them. It wasn't truly for the good of your friend; it was so you would look good. It's pretty obvious that God is not pleased by that sort of foolishness and hypocrisy. Our conversations with God are a sacred blessing and a privilege for believers, not away to impress people.

How to Pray

Then Jesus shows them how to pray. The Lord's prayer isn't intended to be the only prayer we pray but is intended to show us the way in which we show God glory

and our affection for Him. Jesus shows them how to pray and the prayer is completely God-centered and God-focused. There is no room for selfishness in the Lord's prayer.

Hallowed

Jesus starts with the introduction of "Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be your name." Most people probably don't understand the meaning of the word hallowed but it is very important. The Greek word is for hallowed is defined as: to make Holy, to treat as Holy, sanctify. It essentially means to esteem above every other thing in existence. And we are talking about His name, because His name is what we have along with His Spirit. Even His name be hallowed. Even His name is set apart as Holy and above all other names because He is God above all things. Jesus starts the prayer like this because we can't be hypocritical prayers when we start our prayers with "God above, Your Name is the greatest of all names because You are the greatest of all things." That's essentially what Jesus is teaching; that God is the Most High and our hearts need to recognize whom we are praying to from the beginning of our prayer.

"The purpose of the universe is for the hallowing of God's Name." - John Piper

Your Kingdom & Will

There is something God demands all believers to be laser-focused on. What is it? His Kingdom and His will. When we are focused on the Kingdom it takes the focus off of us and leads us to humility. When we want God's will to be done and God's will becomes our will that is God's intention for us. It's only possible to be truly humble when we are focused on the Kingdom and will of God. That focus, by nature, removes our selfishness,

because God's will is a will that makes much of God. Jesus wanted the disciples to know that there is a Kingdom to seek (Mt. 6:33) and a will to know (Rm. 12:2). God must be honored in our prayers, not us.

The beautiful part is that we are loved and favored as ones who give glory and honor to God. It's not a selfish thing to want from God the things He promises us in our communion with Him. The relationship and all it encompasses is the reward we receive.

Our Food & Forgiveness

There is a self-preservation aspect to prayer. We have heard that we should not have selfish prayers and that is true but we have to define what selfish means. It's not selfish to want to have food. Why? Because God wants us to eat and live and bring Him glory in our life. It's not wrong to ask God for things that are in the will of God. Don't make the mistake of forgetting that God created us to need Him; therefore we are going to need to ask Him for things. When we are struggling physically, emotionally, financially, psychologically, relationally, etc.; He loves to provide for His people. Just look at the Israelites when they were in the desert. They needed food, God gave them manna. They needed clothing, God made sure their clothes and sandals didn't wear out. They needed a leader, God gave them Moses, Miriam, and Aaron. God wants to provide for His people. Don't be afraid to ask for the things He promises. He is a good Father.

“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:11)

“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”
(Luke 12:32)

Keep us From Temptation & Evil

God's will for us, among other things, is for us to not only stay away from evil, but for us to realize that He is the One that *keeps* us from evil. God always gets the glory for anything Holy we do. It is only the power of the Holy Spirit through someone that allows them to live a life of holiness, or even a moment of holiness. True righteous living is a life that is Christ-focused and Spirit empowered. Part of Jesus' purpose here is to remind us that we are completely powerless towards evil, temptation, and sin without Him. Only God can defeat sin, even in our smallest of missteps.

Reflection Questions

- What is humility?
- What is prayer?
 - Does it differ from talking?
- What does it mean to pray with the right heart?
- Why would Jesus care about this?
- How do humility and prayer work together?
- Why would Jesus teach the disciples to pray?
 - Is this really necessary? (Yes!)
- What does it mean to hallow His name?
 - Why is this so important, especially in relation to humility?
- What's so important about God's name?
- Is it wrong to pray for things we need?
 - What about things we want?
- Did God create us to need Him? (Did God intentionally make us dependent on Him?)
- What are some ways that a deep look at the Lord's prayer can change our prayer life and our view of God?

The Point: *Hallow His name in word, deed, and prayer.*

FASTING

Chapter 13

"And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that you're fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." -
Matthew 6:16-18

If there is something that the church has forgotten, or maybe just doesn't do because it's difficult; it's fasting. On several occasions Scripture mentions fasting as a form of worship that is a natural part of the Christian life. Jesus is again concerned with a matter of the heart in the hearers of this sermon. He is talking to the people in relation to the condition of their heart, again, not what their hands are doing. There is a theme of Jesus taking what the people see as hand-issues and showing them to be heart-issues. The point is that worship is an act of the heart, not just their hands. Moreover, if their worship is outward to the point that it is done to be seen by others, it is not pleasing to The Lord. Why? Because worship can't please God and also make us look good to other people. There can only be one focus and purpose in worship: ascribing glory to God. If there are ulterior motives in our worship, it becomes a selfish act. Worship, when authentic, is the most humble thing we will ever do, other than giving our life to Christ in salvation.

Why the Constant Talk of Humility?

A good question to ask in this section of Scripture is: Why all this humility talk? I think this is something Jesus was repeating so we would ask this question. Why the constant talk of humility, especially in relation to worship? It is so constantly brought up because worship cannot be true worship unless it is humble worship. The fact is: when we worship, we are in worship to Christ, or ourselves. How can this be? I'll explain. Jesus says that people who: "the hypocrites... they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward." Why does He say this? Because they have received the reward they were looking for. Their reward was the attention of other people. It sounds crazy when we say it, but is the reward we will receive if our worship, in whatever form, is for our glory rather than God's glory. Like previously stated, we are worshiping God or ourselves and the condition of our heart is the indicator for whom we worship.

Fasting

Fasting is something not many people do, at least with the right heart. Some decide to fast because it will give them a head start on a diet. Some fast so they can say they have fasted. There are several reasons to fast that are not towards the heart of God. There are also many reasons people have for not fasting. Jesus makes it apparent that fasting is a natural part of the Christian life. There needs to be some clarity here as well. There are some people with health issues that cannot fast because of blood sugar or some other health reason. Does this mean that they are outside the will of God? Absolutely not! There are surely other things that can be fasted from than food, especially for those who cannot fast. But, why was Jesus concerned with this specific form of worship? Because it shows a deep sign of commitment and love for

God. How many people do you see deciding to go without food just to show their love and devotion to something? Furthermore, what if you found out that they didn't want anyone to know they were doing it? This is such a profoundly beautiful illustration of a persons love for Christ. When we see fasting as a form of worship that shows our devotion to the Redeemer rather than a time where we can't eat, we begin to see it the way God sees it. We must see fasting as a form of worship and the question shouldn't be "How often do I have to fast to be right with God", but we should be asking God "How often do I get to worship in this way?" It's a privilege, not a burden.

In Secret

There is an interesting concept here we don't need to overlook. Jesus says that we are to worship in secret at times. If all of your worship is public, you need to examine your motives. There should be things about our worship and relationship with God that people never see. It's evident from Scripture that these things are to be matters of the heart, and a humble heart at that. Worship in public and worship in private. Again, the condition of our hearts are what God is concerned with. It's a heart issue, not a hand issue.

Reflection Questions

- Why this continual talk about humility?
- What does this tell us about God's desires for us?
- Why is God so very concerned with the condition of our hearts?
- Are there things about your relationship with God that no one sees?
- What does God desire from our worship?
- Is worship the reason we exist? (Yes, it is.)
- What is fasting?
- Why is it important?
- What would someone's purpose be in fasting?
- Have you ever fasted?
- Why is God so concerned not just about worship, but how we worship and the condition of our heart in worship?

The Point: *Worship with your heart... and your stomach at times.*

TREASURE

Chapter 14

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” - Matthew 6:19-24

Treasure is an interesting topic. Many people treasure many different things. Some love lots of money, some love lots of clothes, some love lots of attention, gadgets, games, cars, friends, cats, position, etc. The fact is, everyone treasures something. Jesus speaks to something in the disciples that is easy to see in ourselves today: materialism. It's no secret that people have a severe problem, especially in our country, with materialism. We have so much stuff that we have gatherings called yard sales where we pile up our old junk so other junk lovers can come pilfer through our old junk! It's crazy! But, what we will discover is that our stuff is not evil, nor is it wrong for us to have things. For

example, Solomon was a very wealthy man and God made him wealthy and Solomon was wealthy for a reason. The point is not that we shouldn't have anything; the point is that we treasure Christ over all things. The problem is that the more stuff we have, the easier it is to become distracted and make our stuff our treasure. Moreover, our stuff can't do for us what Christ can. Our stuff will never truly satisfy us.

The Underlying Issue

The real problem with materialism is that we expect our stuff to do something it was never intended to do. We are expecting our moth-and-rust treasure to bring us what only Christ can bring us. Much like expecting a car to fly over the ocean or expecting a cat to bark, they were simply not intended for that purpose. God made us with a need for Him. He made us completely incomplete. We have a desperate need for Him, and not only Him, but what He can do for us like bring us contentment, peace in tough situations, love, attention, forgiveness, etc. He created us as people who need the things that only He can give. The problem is that people misplace this need and place it in other things. Like the man who feels the need to buy a car far outside his means to impress people. What he really needs is Christ to be his treasure, not his car. The same goes for anyone who is seeking their lasting joy and contentment in stuff.

How we Have Gotten it Wrong

I can't count the times I have heard people say, "God wants you to be poor", or "You should feel guilty for having all the stuff you have", or "Eat all your food, you know there are kids in Africa that don't have any food." There are many people in Scripture that had possessions and it was not only ok for them to have them, God gave them the possessions and wealth. The point of the

passage is not that Jesus is giving the disciples a guilt trip. He is showing them that Christ is the treasure, not money. Jesus tells them to store up treasure in heaven and not to store up here. The point is that they are not hoarding their possessions as a means to security and fulfillment. Jesus doesn't say, "You can't have anything," or "don't have possessions." What Jesus is showing the disciples is that possessions are ok, but if your ambition is to store possessions to bring yourself security, that is a problem. If we expect our stuff to bring us anything that Christ alone can give us, we are living in a lack of faith. Our problem is not that the possessions are evil. Our problem, if we are looking for our contentment in stuff, is that we don't believe Jesus to be who He claims to be as our provider and comforter.

There is an asterisk here though. Think about the rich young ruler in Luke 18. What did Jesus tell him to do? Jesus told him to keep the commands and to sell all his possessions and give to the poor. Does this mean that everyone should sell everything and give it to the poor? No. Jesus has a power that we don't: He knew the ruler's heart. Jesus knew that the man was in love with his stuff and it was either Jesus or his stuff. He even had all the signs of a good person. He followed the commands and was faithful in that, but his heart didn't belong to Christ.

We find a similar issue in 1 Timothy 6:10a: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils." It doesn't say, "money is the root of evil." The love of money is A root or ALL KINDS of evil. This means that money has its place and purpose. Its place and purpose is not to be ruler of our hearts. Jesus is showing the disciples that the real and lasting treasure they can seek is Jesus. Think about it. You can invest in something that will never die. Our relationship with Jesus is so indestructible that even time and death cannot destroy or undo the work that we have

done. Whatever you can see in this world and put your hands on will be destroyed one day. All of our clothes, houses, phones, cars, couches, bank accounts, 401K plans, retirement funds, friends, schools, pets, and everything else will be destroyed by time, death, or God. The only thing that we can store up that really will last forever is our treasure in heaven. To store up treasure in heaven is to pursue God and cultivate our relationship with Him because the bond we have with Christ can never be broken and as our relationship gets stronger, that is the treasure we are storing.

Reflection Questions

- What is treasure?
- What was Jesus getting at in saying we should store treasure in heaven and not on earth?
- How do we know when our relationship with our stuff is unhealthy?
 - Why would Jesus be concerned with us being consumed with stuff?
- What are some things people look for in their possessions that only Christ can provide?
- What does it mean for Christ to be our treasure?
- How do we store up treasure in heaven?
- What are some ways to examine ourselves to see if we are too in love with our stuff?
- What did Jesus mean by “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also?”

The Point: *Christ is the Treasure, and only He can placate our spiritual need.*

ANXIETY

Chapter 15

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” - Matthew 6:25-34

This is a perfect follow up to the previous statements about Christ being our treasure and forsaking the treasures of the world. Jesus shows one extreme and now shows the other to put them in perfect balance. First,

Jesus shows the disciples that riches won't sustain them and that He is the treasure they are seeking. Next, He shows them that they will be provided for. Jesus wouldn't send them out without preparing them and taking care of them for the journey. God's providence is such an amazing thing. Time and again the disciples are taken care of even in the face of extreme opposition and danger. God takes care of His people and that's part of the plan. God's intention is for us to depend on Him. The reason Jesus tells them not to be anxious is that there are going to be times when they are going to be worried about what they will buy food with and how they will even be clothed. Jesus called them away from their jobs to follow Him, so that was surely on their minds. It all boils down to a faith issue.

The Reason for Anxiety

We have all experienced anxiety and there is probably not a person on the planet that enjoys that feeling. Your stomach knots up, your palms get sweaty, you can't concentrate on anything else, and you can't enjoy anything until it is resolved. Jesus understands that the disciples have some anxiety and will have even more, so He tells them that the Father sees them and He will provide for their needs. Their focus needs to be the Kingdom and they should expect to be clothed and fed.

You might think, "Well I'm not a disciple, how do I know I'll be taken care of?" Good question. Yes, Jesus was talking to the disciples directly but we have to remember that Jesus is God and He knew that His words would be written in Scripture for generations to read and the promises meant for the disciples are also meant for us. The promise holds true that God still clothes the birds to this day and He will surely clothe you. He gives the birds food and you will surely be fed. These promises are

true for all believers. God is good and He really does take of His people. A good place for reference is the story of the Israelite community in the Old Testament. God continually looked out for them and provided for them even when their hearts were far from Him. Not only is God providential, but He is forgiving. He is not One to hang our mistakes over our heads. Jesus' point is that if He has taken care of birds and grass, how much more will He take care of you who He made in His image? He is worthy of our trust and faith.

The Problem with Anxiety

There are some issues with anxiety and some that may scare you. At the most basic level, anxiety is a sign of a faith issue in us. When we spend our time worrying about the things that we need, situations at school, family drama, friend drama, future plans, etc., we are placing our faith in the situations of our life. If you were unaware, not everything in your life will work out the way you want it to. There will be friends that wrong you, family that lies to you, jobs that deny you, plans that fall through, relationships that hurt, and dreams that might become nightmares. We have to remember that in the midst of these trials in life God is still God and He is always good and aptly capable of taking care of our needs. We cannot put our faith in situations and in people. Jesus is the only one Who has earned our ultimate trust and faith.

Not only is God concerned with giving you food and clothing, but He wants to meet the deeper needs in you that are relational and spiritual. There are needs built into us that only Jesus Himself can fill. Anxiety does nothing but separate us from the comfort we have in Christ.

Jesus ends this section of teaching by saying: “your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom.” As we have studied many times, the word Kingdom in Greek (Basileia) translates to mean: The reign of God in the hearts of men. The Kingdom is what God wants us to seek even more than our very basic needs. Why? Because it’s the most important thing we could give our attention to. There is no other place in Scripture where God tells us to seek something first. There is significant meaning behind the phrase: “Seek first the Kingdom.” Seek first Christ’s reign in your heart because it is there that he must be enthroned. The beautiful part about this is that Jesus knows when the Kingdom (His reign) is our focus then our anxiety about other things, even legitimate physical needs, don’t matter as much anymore. Even the disciples had crises in their lives, but Jesus showed Himself faithful time and again. If you struggle with anxiety, remember that God provides even for small things like birds and grass. He made you in His own image. How much more will He provide for those He calls His children?

Reflection Questions

- What is anxiety?
- What did the disciples have to be anxious about?
- Do you think God wants His people to live in anxiety?
- What does anxiety reveal about a person? (What they find important, a lack of faith, insecurities, etc.)
- What are some ways to combat anxiety?
- What is the opposite of anxiety? (Peace)
 - Why would God want you to have peace over anxiety?
- Why would Jesus mention God taking care of birds and grass?
- What's Jesus' point in telling them that God knows what they need and then telling them to seek the Kingdom first?
- What is the Kingdom?
 - Why would we be told to seek it first?
- Are there going to be times in which we are anxious about something? (Yes)
 - How should we respond when this happens?
- What part does prayer play in anxiety?

The Point: *Anxiety reveals a lack of faith.
God provides.*

JUDGING OTHERS

Chapter 16

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. “Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.”

Matthew 7:1-6

People love to quote these verses but it's almost always in defense of themselves doing something wrong. If we ever find ourselves defending ourselves with this section of Scripture, it's probably a good idea to take a close look at our life to see if there is any substance to the charges brought against us. The problem with our understanding of this verse is that we assume that we should never be judged for anything we do. Let's face it; we act in certain ways because we feel it was the right thing to do for us, right? Then, when someone comes along and questions our motives and actions, we can easily become defensive and throw out verses like Matthew 7:1 and say: “Judge not!” But look closely at what follows. Jesus talks about what happens after the

log it taken out.

This section of Scripture encourages us not to judge others and rightfully so. We have no place to cast judgment on someone. Only One Person sits in authority to cast judgment and that is God Himself. The moment we think we are in a place to judge someone else, we assume that we are in a place of authority over them spiritually and that we are sinlessly obligated to point out their flaws. The interesting part is that God never delegated that duty to us. God is quite proficient at His job of sovereign judge and ruler of the cosmos and He needs no help.

After the Log is Removed

But, notice what Jesus says about after the log is removed. “Then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brothers eye.” See the difference? There is hypocrisy in our hearts when we are riddled with sin and try to help others spiritually. But There is a time when brothers and sisters in Christ can hold each other accountable in a loving a gracious way. Notice that Jesus says: “TAKE the speck out of your BROTHERS eye.” This means help someone in your spiritual family. This doesn’t mean that we should find someone to point out flaw in. There is much danger in us assuming the role of sin-pointer-outer. The Holy Spirit doesn’t need our help convicting people of their sin; He is also very proficient at that job and doesn’t need our help.

What should our response be then? Well, have you noticed a theme of humility in the sermon on the mount so far? Everything Jesus is teaching takes a certain level of humility. Jesus is taking what they know about morality and being “good people” to a heart-level and showing them that God sees their hearts, not just their

hands. God wants to mold and remake our hearts to conform to His. This means that when we see people struggling we don't default to throwing stones; we default to looking into our own lives to see where we have messed up. We repent and run towards Christ, away from the sin that so easily entangles. Then, with hearts full of Christ's love and grace, we help our brothers and sisters in their walk, not by pointing out flaw, but by walking with them and being an encouragement and help to them by modeling a Christ-like life in front of them, always pointing every step of the way, to Christ. Remember the story of Zacchaeus? Jesus didn't have to tell Zacchaeus he was wrong, Jesus' presence and holiness revealed the places in Zacchaeus' heart that were corrupt.

What Would Happen?

What if our lives began to look like that? What if we weren't caught up in pointing out wrong on others to distract from our own insecurities and hang-ups, and began to work on our own lives and modeled a true Christ-like devotion to God in front of people? Unless your heart can keep up with your mouth, your mouth probably needs to stay shut.

We must never forget that we are in need of constant forgiveness, and other people are just the same. We are in this together, not against one another. We all need the grace and salvation of Christ. Help people, don't hurt them. Let your heart be a healing factory for other hearts around you.

Reflection Questions

- What areas of your life hinder you from helping others spiritually?
- What was Jesus' intention for these verses?
- Why would this be important for the disciples?
What about for you?
- How does this reflect the Gospel?
- Are you glad that God is the only judge, and He didn't delegate that job to a human?
- How can you retrain your heart to default to helping, and not judging?
- How does this message from Scripture affect the church if it is carried out properly?
- How does it affect the believer personally if it is carried out properly?

The Point: *Help, don't hurt.*

ASK

Chapter 17

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” -

Matthew 7:7-11

There is a shift in Jesus' teaching in chapter seven. He goes on to some more topics that are probably deep in the hearts of the disciples. In the previous verses He warned about judging others and taking the role of accuser on ourselves and showed how hypocritical that is. Now Jesus tells them something about Himself that is so foreign to many people's perception of Him. He tells them to ask for what they need. Ask. God wants us to ask Him for what we need. It may seem simple but there are so many who want to do things on their own and deny that they really do need help. The beautiful thing about us is that we are completely incomplete. We need God, and He doesn't need us. But He desires us and a relationship with us. Our weakness is intentional on God's part. He created us to need Him, and He is more than capable of supplying all we need.

Our Position

We have to understand what Jesus is talking about in order to accurately understand this text. Jesus tells us to ask for things, but what are the things we ask for? It's easy to ask for things we don't really need. It's easy to dream about a sports car or huge house or expensive jewelry and clothes. It's another thing to think about need and asking for help. Part of the issue is that many, at least in America, don't know what it is to need. We know how to want for things, but not need them. It takes humility to ask for something we need. By asking for it, we admit that we cannot provide it for ourselves and we are asking for assistance. Typically, when we say what we want, it's just wishful thinking. The reason Jesus said this is that He wants to provide for our needs in a way that we learn to trust Him. In the same way that children rely on their parents for food, shelter, clothing, and everything else, Jesus wants us to rely on Him for what we need in every way. He meets financial needs, spiritual needs, relational needs, emotional needs, physical needs, etc. Everything that we need, God can provide. In the same way that it is good for a baby to need his mother, we need the sustaining power of God in our lives. Without it, we are living with so many needs terribly unsatisfied. It is a terrible tragedy to deny the providence of God, which we were all designed to need and have access to.

His Ability

What most people have a problem understanding is that God is able. Moreover, many people think that God is unconcerned with their issues. It's common to hear "God's too busy with other stuff to care about my problems", or "This isn't a big deal to God", or "Christians aren't supposed to need anything." All of these are lies. It's ok to need God and His providence. He made us this

way. To deny it is the most arrogant thing a person can do! Why else would Paul write the Ephesian church saying: “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:20-21)

In these verses Jesus even compares God to a father whose son asks him for a loaf of bread. Why would the father give him anything other than bread? He wouldn't! Why? Because he loves his son. In the same way, God loves His people and provides for them. “How much more will your Father in Heaven give GOOD gifts to those who ask Him!” The point is that God wants to give us what we need. Jesus just finished talking about anxiety and not worrying about what they will eat or drink or wear. Why? Because one of the primary things we are to learn in the life we lead, as a believer is to learn to trust God. It's a process of learning to lean on Him for all that we need, not just bailing us out when times are tough. The point is that we learn to consistently learn to trust God more and more as we develop and mature as believers.

Good Gifts

What are these good gifts? Well, the disciples were at a place where they needed comfort and the ability to trust Jesus because what they were about to do was stressful, very stressful. Changing the world is no small feat. Therefore, Jesus let them know that “good gifts” were available to them and they are available to us as well. Good gifts are things that we need that align us with the will of God. Since God desires us to do His will, He provides us a way to do it. Good gifts are gifts from God that allow us to operate in His will and do what we are

commanded to do. James 1:17 tells us: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” What does this mean? It means God is for us and loves us, provides for us, and makes us Holy. He is the only God. He is a good God, and He loves His people.

Reflection Questions

- What does it mean to need something?
- How is this different than a want?
- What do you think the disciples needed the most at this point in their lives?
- Why would God want us to ask for things?
- Are there things we shouldn't ask for?
- Is there a limit to what we can ask for? Why?
- In context in these verses, what is Jesus encouraging the disciples to ask for?
 - Are these needs or wants?
- Why would Jesus be concerned with the disciples trusting Him?
- Why is He concerned with us trusting Him?
- Can a relationship work without trust? Why?
- What are some things you need to ask God for that you have not asked for in the past?
- Would things have been different in the past had you asked God for what you needed?
- Is there anything God can't give you?
 - Is there anything He won't give you? Why?

- What are the “good gifts” intended to help you do? (Live according to God’s will.)
- What do these verses tell you about God?
 - What does it tell you about His character?
 - What about His love for His people?

The Point: *Trust Him to Provide.*

THE GOLDEN RULE

Chapter 18

“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” -

Matthew 7:12-14

This is one of the most famous verses in the Bible. Well, at least the first part. This is affectionately called “the golden rule.” Most people live by this, even non-believers. It’s built into our culture to be cordial with people and treat them well. There are many reasons why people treat people well: to avoid conflict, to maintain relationships, out of fear that they will be treated badly in return, etc. Most people treat others well because there is simply an inclination in all people to be nice to one another and live in harmony with those around them. This seems simple, but this verse has often become, for some, something it was never intended to be. Some believe that living by the golden rule is all that is required of a person to inherit eternal life. It is commonly thought by people that if they treat others well, then this action and lifestyle makes them a “good person” and merits them favor with God. The scary part is that this is not the case. We know from Scripture that there are none righteous and that we are all sinners, ergo, bad people.

We need Jesus to save us and make us into Holy people. There is a reason that verse 12 is followed by verse 13 and 14. They read: *“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”*

A Narrow Road Leading to a Narrow Gate

Verses 13 and 14 take into account the propensity people have to assume that they are “good people” and that their good deeds will make up for the sin in their lives. This is a dangerous lie because if that is the mindset people have, then there is no use for Jesus in their life, because they can save themselves. Think of it this way: If a person can make up for the sin in their life by being a good person and doing good things, then they are assuming that they can earn their own salvation. This is the lie Jesus came to expose. We are completely powerless against sin and death. Without Christ, we are without hope. The beauty in this is that Jesus knows our helpless state and provides a way to have our sins paid for. This being said, there are some requirements that Jesus has for His followers. Believers must walk what Jesus is calling in verse 13 and 14 the narrow road to the narrow gate. He even goes so far as to call the way hard that leads to life. This means that we can't run around haphazardly doing whatever we want to. There has to be a certain level of intentionality about how we live.

Furthermore, there are simply expectations on those who love and live for Jesus. For example, pro football players are expected to train and remain at the top of their game. If they got lazy and didn't want to do anything, then their heart must not really be in it. It's the same way with the Christian life. When we say to Jesus that He is Lord, #1,

on the throne, etc., we are saying that He is the director and controller of our lives. Jesus is so incredibly wise to quickly follow up the golden rule with the phrase: Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Why is it Difficult?

A common question is, why is this so difficult? There are many directions we could go, but to answer with the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:8b-10

“We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.”

What does this mean? It means that anything worth having is worth fighting for. Following Christ is no easy endeavor and it is that way by design. Jesus knew that following Him was hard and He was explaining to the disciples that if they were going to follow Him, they had to walk the narrow road. This meant, for them, that they were going to leave their jobs, their families, their future plans, their stuff, their friends, all they knew and understood, so that they could follow Jesus. As you know, almost every one of them was eventually killed for their faith. That’s not a sad ending though! Jesus promises that He will raise His followers from the dead to live with Him in Heaven! The disciples are not upset in the least that they followed Jesus, even to the grave. They are in

Heaven at this very moment beholding the Glory of the Most High.

Life in the Kingdom is difficult. We will go through much on the narrow path. The narrow path means that certain friendships, activities, possessions, plans, etc., must be given up because they distract us from the purpose God designed us for. It is difficult, but it is absolutely worth it. Jesus is worthy.

Reflection Questions

- What is the Golden Rule?
- Why is it important for believers to abide by this rule?
- What does it say to people when we don't live by it?
- What does it mean that the road to life is narrow?
- What does it mean that the gate is narrow?
- What does it mean that the way is hard?
- Is following Jesus difficult?
- Do you think it is intentionally difficult?
 - Why?
- What does God require of His people?
- What are some things that characterize a person that lives life on the narrow path?
- What are some practical ways to stay on the narrow path?
- What are warning signs that someone is not on the narrow path?
- What is your plan for remaining faithful and staying on the narrow path?

The Point: *Walk the Narrow Path. You Won't Regret it.*

TREES & FRUIT

Chapter 19

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn-bushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.” - Matthew 7:15-20

There are many analogies in Scripture. One of the prominent ones is the analogy of people being trees and their actions being fruit. Jesus uses the later part of the Sermon on the Mount to show His disciples that there are people that love to tell lies and lead them away from the truth. These people are called false prophets. The false prophets spread lies that kill fruit and the trees in which it grows.

Lies

There are false prophets everywhere. There is also false prophecy everywhere. Jesus is well aware of this and shows us that lies are what destroys our relationship with Him. If the Truth sets us free (John 8:32) then naturally, lies leave us in bondage. Lies are everywhere. Commercials lie to us by sending the message that buying a product will make us happy, or looking a certain way

will bring us lasting contentment. These are lies! In relation to our stance before God, lies are the root of our sin. Think about it. Every sin is in some way traceable back to a lie. Some guys believe that looking at a girl in an inappropriate way is simply something guys do. This is a lie! Why? Because it's lust! Some girls think that telling their friends business that is not their own is needed and just stuff that people need to know. It's a lie! Why? Because it's gossip! This is so important because these lies creep in and gradually steer our hearts in a direction they need not go. Jesus came to seek and save the lost and by that we see that there are lies we simply cannot believe.

There are also false Gospels. There are many "preachers" on TV that will tell you if you give them a certain amount of money, God will return to you more money. It's a lie! Some tell you that becoming a Christian will make you wealthy and you will never have problems. It's a lie! Just look at Paul! What's the point here? Jesus is warning the disciples that people will come to them appearing to be good and Christ-devoted, while in reality, they are wolves in sheep's clothing with the intention of leading them astray. In the same way, believers must be careful to only believe what is true.

Fruit

Jesus even goes so far as to tell the disciples how they will discover these false prophets. How? Fruit. It means that they can know peoples intentions by what they do. This makes us observe a little bit. A good place to start is with our own hearts. We know that our hearts are naturally deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9). We also know that God is able to change us and make us new. Therefore, we have to first look at our own lives and see if we are truly living the way Scripture demands we live.

The point of these verses is that we are known by our fruits. What are we spending our lives on? Do we know more about sports teams and players than Jesus? Do we spend more time pursuing good grades or Christ? Are our minds set on things above (Col. 3:2) or are they set on the world and the false hope found in worldly things? Jesus is making a huge statement here by saying multiple times that people are known by their fruit. False prophets are known by their false prophecy, believers are known by how they live their lives and pursue Christ. It's easy to know who you worship by what you do. Some good ways to find out what fruits you are sprouting are to look at a few areas.

1. What do you look at on the internet most?
2. What do you spend your thought life thinking about?
3. What do you talk about most?
4. What do you spend your money on most?
5. What do want most?

These are some simple ways of gauging where our allegiances are. The idea here is that we are naturally selfish people and Christ calls us to a life of selflessness. Our fruit, or actions, should be selfless actions that make Christ known. Only good trees have good fruit and only Christ-devoted hearts produce Christ-devoted fruit. What fruits are you bearing?

Reflection Questions

- What does Jesus mean by “beware of false prophets?”
- What do lies do to our relationship with God? How?
- How are our sins connected to lies?
- How do we get rid of lies?
- What is the fruit Jesus is talking about?
- How do we produce fruit spiritually?
- How do we know if our fruit is good or bad?
- Why would Jesus want us to produce spiritual fruit?
- How does a person go from a bad tree to a good tree?
- How does the Gospel relate to these verses?
- How can we guard against producing bad fruit?

The Point: *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. - John 15:8*

KNOWN & UNKNOWN

Chapter 20

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’ “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.” - Matthew 7:21-27

Here we see Jesus wrap up His sermon on the mount to His disciples. Take a moment to look back at the sermon thus far. The Beatitudes, Salt & Light, Christ & the Law, Anger, Lust, Divorce, Oaths, Retaliation, Love Your Enemies, Giving to the Needy, The Lord’s Prayer, Fasting, Treasure in Heaven, Anxiety, Judging Others Ask, The Golden Rule, Trees & Fruit, Known & Unknown. Now Jesus tells His disciples that He alone is the source of salvation. Not everyone who thinks they will enter the

Kingdom will actually enter it. Those who build their house (life) on the Rock (Jesus and His Word) do so wisely, and those who do not are foolish. He promises that winds will come, the water will rise, and the rain will come and try to destroy our house (life). Jesus' point is that He is the central focal point of life and without Him; life is not only meaningless, but headed in a direction we do not want to go. What gave Him this authority? He is God.

Not Everyone

It's hard to believe that people, who think they knew Jesus and cast out demons in His Name and prophesied in His Name, actually didn't know Him. What must that be like for a person when they hear the words "I never knew you?" They even argue with Jesus by telling Him the things they did for Him in His Name. The interesting part is that the people in this story are focused on what they did and not what Jesus did. They have made the mistake many make, but is so very harmful. They assumed that their "goodness" would warrant them favor with God. Salvation was never intended to make much of anyone but Jesus. Salvation is not about us. It's about Jesus and His Gospel. If our salvation rests, in any way, on our own work, it is false. It is a gift from God that our works do not bring about. He tells them that they practiced lawlessness. Meaning that there was no cohesion between their confession of Christ and their actions.

The Rock and the Sand

Jesus goes on to say that the man who hears and does the things Jesus teaches is wise. He is similar to a person who builds his house on a rock. The storms will come, though times will happen, but the house will not fall. The reason the house doesn't fall is because it is

sturdy and firmly planted on the appropriate surface. The man, who lazily builds his house on the sand, although it is beachfront and fun for a while, doesn't weather the storm as well as the other guy. The rains come, the flood comes, the winds come and are bent on destruction. Only the sturdy will weather the storm. This is so important for us because this is an illustration for how we live our lives. If Jesus' teachings are not brought to bear in our lives, and they only stay in our heads, then we don't truly know Jesus. The point is that those who are saved, put their faith in Jesus in such a way that they live by His commands, not their own selfish desires. It seems so simple, but so many don't get it. The reason Jesus follows the "not everyone" discussion with the "Rock and Sand" analogy, is that the reason some people think they are going to Heaven and don't is that there has to be action to accompany our faith. Jesus didn't preach a keep-it-to-yourself gospel. He preached a go-do-this Gospel. All of this is an analogy about life and death. The point is that we have to live by His teachings, not just mentally or cognitively, but in action and truth.

Reflection Questions

- What does it mean that not everyone who says Lord, Lord will enter the Kingdom of Heaven?
- Are there people who think they are saved and are actually not saved?
 - How is this possible?
- In the example Jesus gave, what were the people doing in His name? (Casting out demons and prophesying.)
 - What was missing from their defense? (Jesus' work for them.)
- What is salvation?
- How is someone saved?
- What is the Gospel?
- Why is the Gospel so important?
- How can we know that we are truly saved?
- What are some warning signs that someone is not saved?
- How can we examine our lives to see who we truly are?

The Point: *For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. - James 2:26*

CONCLUSION

Chapter 21

“And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.”

Matthew 7:28-29

Authority

The sermon ends with people being in shock (imagine that). They weren't used to someone teaching with authority. Normally the teachers and scribes taught and they ultimately had no authority to attach to their teaching. Jesus comes along and teaches the people with the authority and the right to expect things out of them. We are also included in this. When we read the sermon on the mount, we have to understand that it is fully applicable to our lives and we are responsible for living by the things we have learned. God is good and He means what He says. Moreover, these are the very words of Christ. We get a glimpse into a world that we would not have been able to see otherwise. Jesus spoke these words not just to the disciples 2000 years ago, these words are for believers today to follow and practice. They need no update or refurbishing. It's it amazing to know that Jesus' words never lose their impact and meaning even over millennia?

My hope is that this book has helped you see Jesus. I hope you fall deeply in love with His Word and

His Heart. I hope His Word develops in you a love for His Gospel and a love for people. I hope most of all that you find your contentment and treasure in Christ and in Him alone. To Him belong all things and to Him be glory and honor and power as He is to be forever praised. Amen.

Reflection Questions

- What has been the most interesting thing you have learned from the sermon on the mount?
- How has it changed the way you look at life?
- Do you feel better equipped to grow spiritually? How?
- What are some practical take-away's from this series?
 - How can you apply these to daily life?
- Final assignment – Read through the sermon one more time (Matthew 5-7). Read it as if it's the very first time all over again and let the wisdom of the Word dwell in your heart richly.

The Point: *His authority carries the weight of our decision making.*

*This is life forever, that they know You, the only true
God, and Jesus Christ Whom You have sent. – John 17:3*

