

SERMON

on the



MOUNT

REJOICE & BE GLAD



IF YOUR RIGHT EYE MAKES YOU STUMBLE



ANXIOUS?



ANYONE WHO SAYS TO HIS BROTHER "RACA!"



A Home Group Study of Santa Barbara Community Church

Winter / Spring Calendar 2008

Teaching Date	Study	Text	Title
1/20		Sermon on the Mount	Introduction
1/27	1	5:1-6	Beatitudes, part I
2/3	2	5:7-12	Beatitudes, part II
2/10	3	5:13-16	The Active and Visible Disciple
2/17	4	5:17-20	Continuity Between Jesus and the Law and Prophets
2/24	5	5:21-26	Transformation from Anger and Lust
3/2	6	5:31-37	True to our Word: Faithfulness in Speech & Marriage
3/9	7	5:38-48	Transformation from Retaliation & Hate
3/16	8	6:1-6	Disciplines Before God
3/23	No Study: Easter Sunday		
3/30	9	6:7-15	Praying the Way of Jesus
4/6	10	6:19-34	The Root of Our Dedication
4/13	11	7:1-12	Relationships Transformed
4/20	No Study: Church Retreat		
4/27	12	7:13-20	Living the Truth, Discerning the Lies
5/4	13	7:21-29	Living the Choice

This study guide was written by Bonnie Fearer (studies 1, 2, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13) and Scott Douglas (Introduction and studies 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10). Thanks to our proofers, Sarah Douglas, Katherine Hilzer, Steve Greig and Reed Jolley. A special thanks to our artists, Heidi Palladino (cover), and K.C. Kemp (interior study guide art). Thank you also to Ashlee Stroud, tireless church administrator who does a lot of invisible work to make (many!) things happen.

SOURCES/ABBREVIATIONS

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SOME TIPS ON HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

This study guide was written with a dual purpose:

- 1) To provoke a depth of personal study *and* application; and
- 2) To provide a stimulating springboard for discussion in your homegroups.

To that end, the format will, hopefully, prod us toward application as individuals and as a community. Each study is broken into the following parts:

PONDER: This question, at the beginning of each study, is a question that simply points our thinking in a certain direction, preparing us for what Jesus has to say. Don't skip over these. You will find that they are woven into the body of each study.

READ: Self-explanatory

APPLY: This section is intended for our personal devotional use. Again, the extent to which you are transformed by the words of Christ will be closely hinged to the amount of time you sit before Him, reading, praying, searching, and applying. The challenges in this section are an encouragement to do just that.

FURTHER THOUGHTS: Just a little something extra ... a quote, a poem, a section from a literary piece – something that serves as an adjunct or enhancement to that week's study.

*EXTRA WEB MATERIAL: At the end of each study, you will find a prompt to check out some extra web material that ties to each study. This is primarily poetry and song lyrics that augment the teaching for that week. Thank you to Kim McDaniel for providing this to us. You will find these "extras" at: <http://sbcommunity.org/life/homegroups/>.

Finally, we would like to extend an encouragement to read the Sermon on the Mount every day for one month. It takes about 15 minutes. Yes, it is a commitment. Will it make a difference? Absolutely yes! Give it a try and watch what God does in your heart and thinking as a result.

The second challenge is to work through this study guide in increments throughout your week – not cramming at the last minute. If you are not in the habit of taking time to be quiet before God each and every day, wouldn't now be the perfect time to start? Again, try it, and watch what God does in your life!

*When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small:
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The Sermon on the Mount represents the largest block of Jesus' teachings in Scripture. What Jesus teaches us here is revolutionary, counter intuitive, counter cultural, upside down or right side up ---so radical that even these descriptors may be lost on us. If we cannot read this text without being challenged, convicted, or uncomfortable, we may be asleep at the wheel. Some of us are in need of some foundational deconstruction with respect to our beliefs and lifestyle. For others, it is time to begin to build. The foundation is here and it may be new to you, or you may have been standing on it for years with your hands in your pockets. The point is to get in on what God is building. Understanding the Sermon on the Mount is essential to following Jesus as individuals and, importantly, as a community. The early church referenced this text more than any other to teach Christian discipleship.¹ Discipleship, in simple terms, means to "attempt to do what Jesus said to do."² And what Jesus says to do is found most notably in this Sermon on the Mount. Additionally, these teachings, as found in the Gospel of Matthew 5-7, contain practical ethical content, and arguably remain the most recognized and, perhaps, least understood of Jesus' teachings. Overall, the Sermon on the Mount is a call to transformation from the inside out, a transformation that will affect our lives together in Christian community, and in our outreach to a hurting world.

The content of Jesus' teaching is amazingly practical. With major themes of love, peace and reconciliation, we find Jesus inviting us to break our cycles of sin, to be transformed in our hearts and to actively participate in God's way of grace. It is remarkable that the first teachings to come from Jesus contain blessing. The first eleven verses in the Sermon on the Mount are called "the Beatitudes," which means "blessings." In them we find God declaring blessing upon those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who make peace, and special blessing for those who are persecuted. These qualities display a direct opposition to culturally prized ethics of power, dominance, affluence and entitlement of Jesus' time, and they continue to do the same today. The Beatitudes logically and powerfully condition all the teachings that follow in the Sermon on the Mount. As a community of disciples we are called to show the character of God to the world. This "city on a hill" is characterized by a "greater righteousness," that displays reconciliation over anger, the discipline to control lust, a lifelong fidelity-honoring marriage, honest promises, renunciation of retaliation and love of enemy which conquers hate. And this is just chapter five!

Let us take a brief look at the structural and thematic elements of Matthew's Gospel because it is fascinating and will help us establish context. The major themes of Matthew revolve around the intent to show continuity between Jesus and the Law and Prophets of the Old Testament - Jesus as Teacher, Jesus in continuity with the Law, and Jesus as deliverer and lawgiver. These themes are manifest in part by Matthew's thoughtful structure of the entire gospel. There are 5 blocks of Jesus' teachings, which

¹ Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, p. 128.

² Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, p.

correspond to the five Books of Moses – the first block is The Sermon on the Mount.¹ And within the Sermon there are 14 teachings that show Jesus referencing the traditional righteousness of the Law, the vicious cycles by which we are bound, and a practical transforming application to break the cycle of sin. Six of these teachings find Jesus' words set beside the Law; "You have heard it said..." and followed by Jesus' authoritative marker "But I say to you..." Jesus does not reference other authorities to support his interpretation, as was commonly expected. He didn't need to because he had the direct knowledge of the original intent of the Law. The effect "is a deeper meaning in the sacred writings than first-century Israel had grasped; it is this deeper meaning that Jesus is commending."²

The context and setting for the Sermon provide an appropriate starting point to begin interpretation. Have you ever wondered why this teaching is called the Sermon on the Mount? We read in 5:1-2, "Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them." The location of the sermon is not a chance occurrence. While the effect may be lost on us, Matthew is interested to show the symmetry between Jesus and Moses - Mount Sinai and the giving of the Law → Galilean mountain and the Sermon on the Mount. But Jesus is not simply a new and greater Moses, he is the Messiah, God with us. The immediate response to Jesus' teachings is found at the close of the Sermon – 7:28-29, "Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as their scribes."

Does Jesus really expect us to follow these teachings? What is your perspective? Do you think these are impossible teachings that no one can truly follow? To think that the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount are impossible and/or unattainable presents a hazard: We can then either completely dismiss the teachings or, with equal danger, internalize them with a subjective twist that makes them "easier" or more palatable. The text of the Sermon throughout, provides compelling evidence that Jesus intends his disciples to follow these teachings in the present. He says, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (7:19). And again, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (7:21). Finally, after telling the parable of the wise man that built his house on the rock, "And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like the foolish man who built his house on the sand" (7:26). Jesus intends for us to be transformed within our hearts *and actively participating in God's way of living life, now.*

Importantly, the Sermon on the Mount is not an instruction list for how to become a Christian. Jesus is speaking to those who already were –and are—his disciples. Oswald Chambers says, *If Jesus is a teacher only, then all He can do is to tantalize us by erecting a standard we cannot come anywhere near. But if by being born again from above we know Him first as Savior, we know that He did not come to teach us only: He*

¹ 5:1-7:27, 10:5-42, 13:1-52, 18:1-35 and 23:1-25:46

² Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, p. 289.

came to make us what He teaches we should be. The Sermon on the Mount is a statement of the life we will live when the Holy Spirit is having his way with us.¹

The teachings of the Sermon are demanding and rigorous. This study seeks to emphasize that it is Jesus, God in flesh, who breaks into the cycle of sin in our lives; who invites us to participate in the way of life God intends --this is the Kingdom of God! May God receive glory because our transformation in Christ is personally real and corporately active as we follow the way of Jesus. To prepare, let us get on our knees and plead for this real transformation.²

Sermon Notes. . .

¹ Oswald Chambers, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Discovery House, 1995) p.13

² Suggestion: try to find a recording of Al Green singing "Jesus is Waiting." Seriously, let this groove take you over and put a pep in your step.

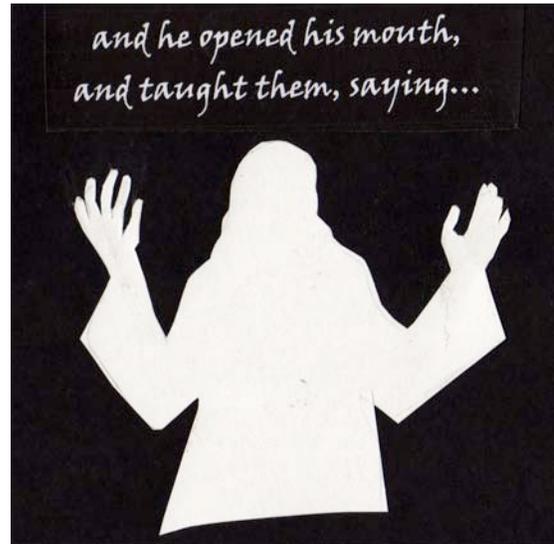
Sermon Notes. . .

Study One

The Beatitudes, Part I

Matthew 5:1-6

PONDER: Before we look at this week's Scripture, think about the messages our current American culture sends. Write down 2-3 things you think our culture defines as important.



We are about to embark on a journey through what some have called the “topsy-turvy kingdom” of God. In the Beatitudes, perhaps more than any other place in his teachings, Jesus puts the proper order of things on its head. The word “beatitude” literally means “blessed.” In seminary, the study of homiletics (i.e., how to preach) would rarely, if ever, advise young pastors to begin their sermon with a list --but Jesus does! He begins this great sermon with a list of eight qualities, qualities that define the character of a Christian disciple. Each quality is followed by a blessing, usually a blessing of future reward. Jesus calls blessed those who would, by cultural standards, seem cursed. How are we to interpret the eight qualities that Jesus commends here? When Jesus refers to the meek, the peacemakers, the mourners, is he referring to different types of people, different kinds of disciples? On the contrary, in the words of John Stott, *the Beatitudes are Christ's own specification of what every Christian ought to be.*¹ Moreover, as we continue through the Sermon on the Mount, we will see how the Beatitudes are integrally tied to, and woven through, every part of Christ's teachings.

READ: Matthew 5:1-6. As you read through it a second time, pause after each verse and ask God to guide you through this study, revealing His intentions to you. Write down any initial questions you have about this section.

Matthew 5:3 *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

? What do you think it means to be “poor in spirit?”

¹ John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, (IVP 1978) p. 31

? What obstacles prevent us from growing toward a poverty of spirit in our world?

? What obstacles do you see in your own life?

Respond to this quote from Peter Kreeft:

If we come to God with empty hands, he will fill them. If we come with full hands, he finds no place to put himself. It is our beggary, our receptivity, that is our hope.¹

+Matthew 5:4: *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

On the face of it, this might appear to be the most oxymoronic of the Beatitudes. Is Jesus saying, “Happy are the unhappy?” What kind of joy is promised in grief, and what kind of sorrow is Jesus referring to? Read the following:

- 2 Cor. 7:10: *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret...*
- Isa. 66:2: *This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.*
- Ps. 34:18: *The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

John Stott says: *This is the second stage of spiritual blessing. It is one thing to be spiritually poor and acknowledge it; it is another to grieve and to mourn over it. Or, in more theological language, confession is one thing, contrition is another.²*

? When have you mourned over your own sin? How did God make his comfort known to you?

¹ Peter Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*, (San Francisco, Ignatius Press 1992), p. 105

² John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, (Intervarsity Press, 1978) p. 41

? What, besides our own sin, produces Godly sorrow?

Matthew 5:5 *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

“Meek.” When was the last time you heard that word used in conversation? It’s easy for the word “meek” to conjure up an image of wimpy passivity. However, the Greek adjective, *praus*, means “gentle, humble, considerate, courteous.” *Praus* is a word of power –not wimpyness—because the quality it defines requires self-control.

? Think of someone you know who illustrates this “meekness” in his/her life. How do they live this out and what about them do you find admirable?

? What is the opposite of meekness? Where do you see yourself on the spectrum between the two?

Matthew 5:6 *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.*

To hunger and thirst is something that goes beyond *desiring* something; it is much more than an intellectual acknowledgement that a thing is worthy of attaining. To hunger and thirst is to know, deep down, that we *need* something for our very survival.

Scripture is replete with God’s promises to the spiritually hungry:

- Ps. 107:9 *...for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.*
- John 7:37 - *...Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."*
- Isa. 55:1-2 *Come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.*

? When Jesus calls us to hunger and thirst for righteousness, what is he asking? How would you define “righteousness” from a biblical perspective?

? Jesus criticizes the Pharisees throughout his ministry for pursuing righteousness through their outward acts of religiosity. How is this different from a “hunger and thirst” for righteousness?

APPLY:

v. 3 - To be “poor in spirit” implies an *emptying* of sorts. Perhaps we have habits or attitudes that we grasp onto for security or comfort. Perhaps we have set up things that interfere with our need for God. Do we find ourselves preoccupied with managing our time, our money, our relationships, to the extent that they offer us enough distraction to keep us from Him? Think about these things. What can you let go of that will make room for a “beggary and receptivity” to God? Set some goals and *pray!* If you are willing, share these goals with your homegroup, and ask them to pray for you.

v. 4 - Search Scripture and find a verse, or verses, that instruct you how to tear down the obstacles(s) you find in your own life with respect to meekness. Share these verses with your group.

v. 5 - Those who mourn their own sin also mourn the sins they see in the world around them.¹ Think of a sin in the world that breaks your heart. How do you pray about this? If you don't, set some prayer goals. It can be a few minutes a week, but just get started! Is there a way you can participate in the answer to your prayer by giving of your time and energy to this area?²

v. 6 – Read Romans 9:30 -10:4. Simply celebrate in prayer what Jesus has done for you. And then, pray for an increased hunger and thirst for him.

¹ Extra credit: Read Ezra 9 to see an example of this in Scripture.

² If your heart breaks over homelessness and addiction, can you help at the Rescue Mission? If your heart breaks over the inequities in our city with respect to race and opportunities, can you contribute a few hours a week to Kid's Club?

FURTHER THOUGHTS:

The Beatitudes...are not teachings on how to be blessed. They are not instructions to do anything. They do not indicate conditions that are especially pleasing to God or good for human beings. No one is actually being told that they are better off for being poor, for mourning, for being persecuted, and so on, or that the conditions listed are recommended ways to well-being before God or man. Nor are the Beatitudes indications of who will be on top "after the revolution." They are explanations and illustrations, drawn from the immediate setting, of the present availability of the kingdom through personal relationship to Jesus ... The Beatitudes simply cannot be "good news" if they are understood as a set of "how-tos" for achieving blessedness. They would then only amount to a new legalism. They would not serve to throw open the kingdom ---anything but.¹

For more, see <http://sbcommunity.org/life/homegroups/>

Sermon Notes. . .

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*, (J. Harper, 1998), p. 106

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Two
The Beatitudes, Part II
Matthew 5:7-12



PONDER: Think about the following things: your “rights”; your *motives* (at school, work, in relationships); your *reputation* (or popularity). All of these are likely to be important to you by varying degrees. Think about the prominence each plays in your thinking. All affect our relationship with God. To what extent do you surrender (any of) these to God’s care?

READ: Matthew 5:7-12. Stop and pray that God would illuminate His Word to you, challenging you in the deepest places, and guiding you into all truth by his Holy Spirit.

As you read through this second portion of the Beatitudes, camp out on each one long enough to think through the connection between the character challenge Jesus calls for, and the blessing that follows. Write down some of your observations.

In last week’s study (the first four Beatitudes), we saw four attitudes of the heart that primarily reflected our relationship with God. This week, we will notice a shift to a greater emphasis on our relationships with other people. Jesus spoke these words into a world that prized power, ambition and the appearance of righteousness through outward acts. Really, what has changed that much over the last 2,000 years? As you read through the following verses, remember that Jesus’ call to transformation from the inside out was controversial and radical then, and is no less so today. It is what many have called the “upside-down” kingdom of God – a place where the humble (not the powerful) are exalted, the least become the greatest, and where the last go first.

Matthew 5:7 *Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*

READ: Matthew 18:21-35

? What connection do you see between forgiveness and mercy?

? As you read the parable of the unmerciful servant, what is the missing ingredient when the first servant pleads with the king?

? As we read throughout the Gospels, mercy is, firstly, an attribute of God. The call to imitate His mercy is two-fold – to be merciful in attitude and merciful in action. How are you challenged by this Beatitude? Where do you need to grow in mercy?

Matthew 5:8 *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

? How would you define “purity in heart”? List as many synonyms and adjectives as you can.

Read Matthew 23:25-28. Considered part of the “seven woes” that Jesus levels at the Pharisees, these verses are three blistering criticisms of the Pharisees’ attention to the outward *appearance* of righteousness, while ignoring the inward *heart* of righteousness.

Respond to the following:

Purity of heart must involve integrity, a correspondence between outward action and inward thought, a lack of duplicity, singleness of intention... and the desire to please God above all else. More succinctly: Purity of heart is to will one thing, God’s will, with all of one’s being and doing.¹

? List a few areas where you struggle most with a disconnect between what you believe, and how you behave. If you are willing, share this with your group and pray for each other.

Matthew 5:9 *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.*

The historical backdrop at the time Jesus spoke these words included a movement by a sect called *Zealots*. The Zealots believed that they could hasten the kingdom of God through violence and military action. For the many who were poor and oppressed under Roman rule, this approach would have been a

¹ Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 1:456

constant temptation. The Zealots believed that by their “take charge” militarism they could prove that they were loyal sons of God. Jesus, on the other hand, says that it will be the peacemakers who are the true children of God.

? What is the difference between being a *peacemaker* and a *peacekeeper* (one who keeps the peace)?

? Read Ephesians 2:11-22. How did Jesus model peacemaking?

? How do you think Christ is asking you to respond to this challenge to be a peacemaker in your own life? As a church? In our community?

Matthew 5:10-12: *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

? List the types of persecution you see mentioned in these verses. Which of these have you experienced for your faith in Jesus? How did you respond?

? Though perhaps not listed here, what do you think might be the most *subtle* forms of persecution in our culture?

? The blessing promised in this Beatitude is a future reward – the kingdom of heaven. In a time and culture that promises, and pursues, instant gratification from all corners, how do you respond to this notion of future reward?

? Read Hebrews 12:1-3. What was the “joy set before him”?

APPLY:

v. 7 John Stott says: *The point of this parable is not that we merit mercy by mercy or forgiveness by forgiveness. The point is that we cannot receive the mercy and forgiveness of God unless we repent, and we cannot claim to have repented of our sins if we are unmerciful toward the sins of others.*¹

To live out this parable then, requires that we prayerfully search our hearts for those things we need to repent of before God, and those things we need to ask forgiveness of from others. Spend time this week in prayer over these things. If you need to forgive others, pray that God would give you the grace to extend that as well.

v. 8 Slowly (and more than once), pray through Psalm 24. Worship the *King of Glory!*

v.9 Being a peacemaker, or “making peace,” is more than being an agent in reconciliation between two parties in conflict. Peacemaking is intimately linked with the prior Beatitude – Jesus calling for our purity of heart. Are we drawn to gossip and intrigue? Do we insist on our rights with no thought to the larger purposes of how God might view our situation? Do we default to anger easily? These are areas of “commission” (things we do) that we need to examine and turn from in order to be peacemakers. There are also sins of “omission” (things we leave undone) that prevent us from being peacemakers. Blinking at the injustices around us – both in our day to day lives, and in the larger world picture – is a sin of omission. Think through all of this – both the sins of commission and omission that keep you from being a peacemaker. List them, confess them, and pray for God’s help.

vv. 10-12 The precursor to persecution is always living out our faith openly and unashamedly, not covertly or “under wraps.” How is it with you? How many of your acquaintances know your heart for Jesus (beyond the fact that you go to church)? What are some intentional steps you can take to be more courageous with your beliefs?

¹ John Stott, *The Beatitudes: Developing Spiritual Character*, (IVP 1998), p. 38

FURTHER THOUGHTS:

The typically modern mind is much more subjectivistic than the premodern mind. It seeks happiness rather than blessedness, feeling rather than fact. Thus its relativistic slogan is: "Happiness is ... different things to different people." ... The response of the modern mind to the Beatitudes is, "Well that may be OK for you, but not for me. For me, happiness is a warm puppy" Within horizons bounded by subjective feeling, no one is ever wrong because no one is ever right. It is indeed a warm, puppyish world. By contrast, Jesus is like a glacier, or an explosion, or the blast of a trumpet from heaven. As Matthew notes at the end of his sermon, "When Jesus had ended these sayings, ... the people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (7:28-29). Happy feelings do not astonish, but objective reality often does. Jesus offers us a plunge into the breathtakingly steep mountains and gorges of reality.¹

For more, see <http://sbcommunity.org/life/homegroups/>

Sermon Notes. . .

¹ Peter Kreeft, *Back to Virtue* (Ignatius Press, 1982) p.88

Sermon Notes. . .

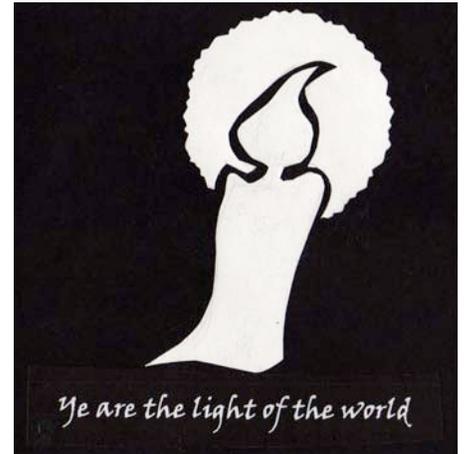
Study Three

The Active and Visible Disciple

Matthew 5:13-16

PONDER: Read and reflect: *If we simply affirm the realities of our world without also seeking to change them, then we are not the salt and light that God calls us to be.*¹

How do you see yourself as an agent of change in our world?



READ: Matthew 5:13-16.

Do you struggle with your identity as a follower of Jesus? Have you ever been curious about what word pictures Jesus would use to describe his followers? In this text we find them as Jesus illustrates the identity and function of the disciple with metaphors of *salt*, *light* and *works*.

Salt *You are the salt of the earth...*

Metaphor is a literary tool Jesus uses in this collection of verses to establish the identity, and consequent function, of a disciple. Salt had various uses in the ancient near east – seasoning, purification, and fertilization for land (and later as a preserving agent). Out of the Old Testament we read that salt represented purity (Ex. 30:35, II Kings 2:19-23), covenant loyalty (Lev. 2:13, Num. 18:19), additive to sacrifices (Lev. 2:13), and seasoning for food (Job 6:6). We cannot be sure which of these uses of salt Jesus had in mind, but the effect can be implied.

? With these various uses of salt in mind, what does it mean for you to be salt? Get away from the abstract answer and get practical. How are you a disciple at work, at home and in the classroom?

...but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

After establishing a metaphor for the identity of the disciple, *You are the salt of the earth*, Jesus presents a question about what happens to salt when it has lost

¹ Charles Ringma, *Resist the Powers with Jacques Ellul*, p. 305.

its taste. Jesus provides the answer: salt is useless and is consequently thrown out. Jesus says it is “trampled under foot,” drawing an image for his audience of the trash they regularly walked over in the street. The implied effect is that of hopelessness - salt that is no longer good is trash.

? Changing gears from the metaphor to our present day reality as disciples, what do you think is the parallel lesson for us? What does it mean for us to “lose our taste” as followers?

Light *You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.*

In tandem with v. 13, Jesus continues to give us a word picture to show what true discipleship is. Light is a consistent theme in Scripture. It is interesting to note that in Matthew 3:16 Jesus himself is referred to as light, and here Jesus is announcing to his disciples that they are to be the light of the world.

? Read Isaiah 2:2-5. This is likely the Scripture Jesus had in mind as he was teaching. Typically a city built on a hill was for defense. How does this text from Isaiah change the concept of a city on a hill?

? Jesus gives two illustrations of light that demonstrate his intent for disciples – a city on a hill and a lamp placed on a lampstand. What do these illustrations mean?

? Good and bad, what is the church illuminating to the world? Are there areas where the light is not on? (In both questions think through the progression of the wider Church, SBCC, and yourself.)

Works *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in Heaven. (16)*

Finally we move to the conclusion, which contains the sole command of this section (v. 13-16) : *let your light shine before the others*. Notice that Jesus moves from the metaphor to the objective – light → good works. The emphasis is on action. The intent of the salt and light metaphors is to direct disciples to be active in good works. Clearly Jesus intends his teachings to be followed today.

? What does it mean to live our faith “in full view”?

? What are the obstacles for you living your faith “in full view”?

There is an evangelistic theme in this text, which is consistent throughout Matthew’s gospel. Jesus says that the effect of doing good works is that others will see and give glory to God. Let us be challenged by his words.

? Think through the categories listed below. In your group, share how you are active in these areas and invite others to join you. Also, share how you think we are missing the point and how we can correct our absence in some categories. Let us encourage each other to be actively participating in God’s kingdom work.

- Peacemaking
- Economic Justice
- Social Justice
- Racial Justice
- Creation Care

APPLY:

If, as “salt,” we are to be “different” as disciples, and as “light” we are to be in mission to the world, what transformation in thought and lifestyle do you need to pursue? Be specific.

Webercise: The following is a list of “cities on a hill” –ministries within Santa Barbara that our church financially supports, and for which many of us volunteer. Do you know what they are about? Check out their websites, or call their volunteer coordinators. Get informed and importantly, pray for God to lead you into active service – Go, be salt; be light.

Campus Crusade
www.campuscrusadeforchrist.com
Chris Comstock: comstockcsb@gmail.com

Eastside Ministries
www.sbcommunity.org/missions/eastside
Ruben & Holly Gil/Kristy Majer:
rhgil@cox.net/dristymajer@gmail.com

Fellowship of Christian Athletes
www.socalfca.org
Jen Shin: JenPrice@fca.org

Goleta Homework Club
Krista Beard
kristabeard@hotmail.com

Habitat for Humanity
www.Habitat.org
Joyce McCullough: joyce@sbhabitat.org

InterVarsity
www.intervarsity.org
Rob Knight: kniteline@aol.com

International Students Incorporated
www.isi-santabarbara.org
Tim & Kim Notehelfer: tnotehelfer@isiwebnet.net

Life Network
www.lifenetworksb.org
Jill Baker: ajbaker@verizon.net

SB Community Development Center
www.santabarbaracdc.org

SB Rescue Mission
www.Sbrm.org
Scott Douglas: sdouglad@filmg.com

Transition House
www.transitionhouse.com
Jen Higa: jenhiga@westmont.edu

Wednesday Homeless Feeding in the Park
Chase Koop: chase.koop@gmail.com

Young Life Special Needs (Capernaum)
www.santabarbara.younglife.org
Stacy Demmin: sdemmin@gmail.com

FURTHER THOUGHTS:

It happened once, when the Congregation of the Missionary Brothers of Charity was first established, that a young Brother came to me and said, "Mother, I have a special vocation to work with the lepers. I want to give my life to them, my whole being. Nothing attracts me more than that." I know for a fact that he truly loved those afflicted with leprosy.

I, in turn, answered him, "I think that you are somewhat wrong, Brother. Our vocation consists in belonging to Jesus. The work is nothing but a means to express our love for him. That is why the work in itself is not important. What is important is for you to belong to Jesus. And he is the one who offers you the means to express that belonging."¹

For more, see <http://sbcommunity.org/life/homegroups/>

¹ Mother Teresa, *In My Own Words* (Gramercy, 1996) p. 107

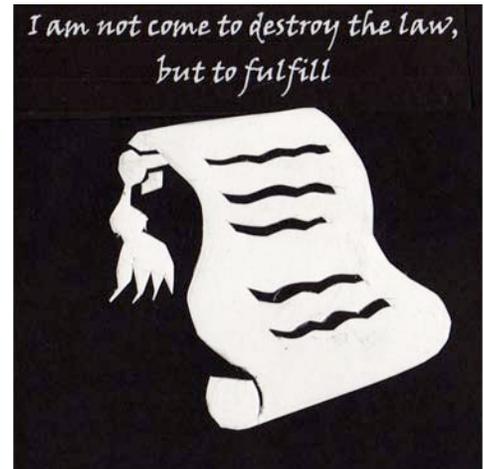
Sermon Notes. . .

Study Four

Continuity Between Jesus and the Law and Prophets

Matthew 5:17-20

PONDER: Think in general terms (not just spiritual). What are your greatest motivations for obedience? Are you motivated more by a rational understanding of the command? A heartfelt trust in the “commander?” Are you motivated by the potential of a positive outcome for yourself? Think broadly and honestly.



As we read our Bibles, we can find ourselves confounded as to how the Old Testament relates to the New Testament. In the verses that preface the main body of the Sermon on the Mount we find Jesus addressing the role of the Hebrew Bible in relation to his teachings and actions. After all, Jesus was Jewish, and Jesus was God in the flesh. This text is pivotal to our understanding

READ: Matthew 5:17-20.

Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish the law, but to fulfill the law. 5:17

The first half of this statement indicates that there was some speculation regarding what Jesus was teaching with respect to the Law. On the one hand, it is clear the regard Jesus had for the Hebrew Bible - the Scriptures are authoritative. Throughout the gospel of Matthew we find numerous Scripture quotations. For example, look at the chapter preceding the Sermon on the Mount. We find Jesus in the wilderness temptations, resisting the devil with direct citations from scripture – in sequence, Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:16 and 6:13.

On the other hand, Jesus' phrase “*I have come*” implies a fulfillment directly related to Old Testament prophecy. Jesus is fulfilling the prophecy of a Messiah who would come and deliver Israel. Matthew makes the point in a number of places by the use of the phrase “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet...”¹The problem for many of his listeners was they were looking for something very different from what Jesus actually embodied.

? In what ways do you find yourself conforming Jesus to meet your expectations?

¹ 1:22, 2:23, 3:3, 4:14, 11:13

When we look at this idea of “to fulfill,” we can immediately conclude from the text that fulfillment does not mean the Hebrew Bible has become irrelevant and useless. The Greek verb “to fulfill” literally means, “to fill.”

? What does this mean - Jesus ‘fills’ the Law? What is it that Jesus is doing with the Law? Is the Law changed?

The issue is not the legitimacy of the Law, but rather the interpretation of the Law. It is not a challenge to the authority of Scripture but a challenge to the human tradition of interpretation. Jesus reinterprets the Law – as it was originally intended. The Law is not changed, it is explained. If questions remain, Jesus goes on to elaborate the continuity of the Law in definitive language. Stott states it this way:

Jesus disagreed with the Pharisees’ interpretation of the law; he never disagreed with their acceptance of its authority. Rather the reverse. In the strongest possible terms he asserted its authority as God’s Word written, and called his disciples to accept its true and deeply exacting interpretation.¹

For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks 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. 5:18-19

The formula “Truly I tell you” is a marker of Jesus’ authority. For the first time in the Sermon he is speaking in the first person. Notice the duration of the Law. If there is any question to the extent Jesus regards scripture he references the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, yod, and the smallest stroke, keraia, likely referring to marks that distinguish between Hebrew letters.²

? What are the commandments Jesus is referring to?

? What are the two expectations Jesus has for disciples (v. 19)?

¹ Stott, 81.

² Ibid, 73.

? Jesus says we are not to merely follow the commandments; we are to teach others. What does it mean to teach the commandments to others? List some practical ways you can do this.

? Do you think Jesus is teaching salvation by works? ¹ Explain.

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 5:20

? These same scribes and Pharisees were known to be slavishly observant of the law, aspiring to follow 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions. When Jesus asks for a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, what is he really asking? Read the following verses. How do these texts contribute to your understanding?

- Deuteronomy 30:6-10
- Isaiah 10:1-3
- Jeremiah 31:33, 32:38-40

At this point, undoubtedly some may feel a tension regarding a perception of Old Testament Law and what Jesus is commanding. Let's take a look at the context. There is a continuing thread of controversy between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees. While Jesus affirms the authority of the Law, he clearly diverges from interpretations made by the religious authorities. As we will observe in future studies, Jesus disagrees with their whole perspective about what the Law, and pursuing righteousness, is all about. This may help:

Jesus had a prophetic rather than legalistic understanding of righteousness. For the prophets, true righteousness consisted of deeds of love, mercy and justice, especially to the most vulnerable. This undeniable prophetic emphasis had slipped from the center of rabbinic/scribal tradition, replaced with a focus on ritual purity and freedom from defilement in which Jesus had very little interest.²

¹ Jesus is not talking about obedience/works that is dependent for salvation. Obeying the commandments is in line with, "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure" Phil. 2:12b-13.

² Stassen and Gushee, p. 93.

The impact of the Old Testament reverberates. Stassen and Gushee state, “We believe the Sermon on the Mount itself is best understood as a series of interpretations of teachings in the Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy) and the Prophets.”¹ Matthew 5:17-20 provides a reference point to interpret the teachings and actions of Jesus as found throughout Matthew.

APPLY:

Conduct a word study on mercy and justice in the Old and New Testaments. If you do not have a concordance, use this website: www.biblegateway.com. Type in the terms “mercy” and “justice” and look up each scripture reference. Immerse yourself, read them all and delight in God.

Are you seeking the righteousness that Jesus calls us to? In what areas do you feel convicted? Write these down and commit to praying for growth.

FURTHER THOUGHTS:

Every covenant in the Old Testament is an expression of God’s grace. Grace to all mankind with Noah as the covenant-partner; grace to Abraham and Sarah, and through them not only to a chosen people but all humanity; grace to the people of Israel at Sinai, through Moses, after grace in the exodus; grace to Israel in covenant with David and his line. So the covenants themselves are grace, promising a future with God’s presence, guidance and blessing. They require obedient and faithful response... The Torah, as Jesus said, is about the love of God and the love of neighbor (Mt 22:34-40, quoting 6:5; Lev. 19:18), in response to the prior love of God the Creator, Righteous Judge and Deliverer.²

And

Jesus Christ was willingly obedient during his whole life and even unto the death of the cross, and am I unwilling to spend my life in the exercise of obedience and to make it my cross and my merit? Independence belongs to God who has made man dependent on others that his subordination may be to him the means of his sanctification. I will therefore form myself upon the model of my submissive, dependent, and obedient Savior, and dispose of nothing in myself, not even of my own will.³

For more, see <http://sbcommunity.org/life/homegroups/>.

¹ Stassen and Gushee, p. 91.

² Stassen and Gushee, p. 92.

³ From Thomas A Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*

Study Five
Transformation from Anger
and Lust
Matthew 5:21-26

PONDER: The media has an obsession with murder. The local news, in particular, is built on reporting violence (and questionable weather forecasts). The impact of this saturation is staggering. Have you ever thought about the root of our culture of violence? What cycles of sin do you think are at the source?



We now move into the main body of the Sermon on the Mount. This section is the first of six occasions when Jesus interprets the Old Testament Law (5:21-48). The exchanges are famously phrased, “You have heard it said...” and follow with “...but I say to you...”¹

READ: Matthew 5:21-26.

You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ 5:21

Jesus begins with the fifth commandment located in the Ten Commandments: *You shall not kill* (Exodus 20:13, Deut. 5:17). The commandment had been traditionally applied in a singular fashion: murder → judgment. However, as we will see, Jesus deepens the meaning of the commandment and broadens the application.

But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother (or sister) you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother (or sister) you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire. 5:22

? To cross-reference anger in scripture, look at the following. How do these verses add to your understanding of our text this week?

¹ Scholarship has termed this an ‘antithesis.’ However, this term is misleading. Jesus is not giving an antithesis, or exact opposite, of the OT law but rather Jesus is reinterpreting the OT law.

- Matthew 21:12-17
- Matthew 23:17
- Ephesians 4:26

? Is Jesus prohibiting anger? If not, what then is he condemning?

Looking back at v. 22, we see that Jesus addresses insults directed at a brother or sister in the faith. The sentence, *...and if you insult a brother (or sister) you will be liable to the council*, uses the Aramaic word, *raca*. The connotation of this word is of something being empty. The insult is in line with offending someone's intelligence. In Greek, the sentence translates, *...and if you say, 'you fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire.*¹

Respond to this quote:

*Jesus in fact gives no command not to be angry or not to call anyone a fool. In the Greek of the New Testament, "Being Angry" in Matthew 5:22 is not a command, but a participle, an ongoing action. It is a diagnosis of a vicious cycle that we often get stuck in: being angry, insulting one another. It is simply realistic: we do get angry, we do insult one another, and it does lead to trouble.*²

? How is Jesus drawing an equivalent between murder, and anger and insult?

? Have you experienced a cycle of anger in yourself? What was (has been) the result?

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother (or sister) has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother (or sister) and then come and offer your

¹ Both examples from Stott, p. 84.

² Stassen and Gushee, p. 134.

gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on your way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown in prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. 5:23-26

? Which Beatitudes come to mind that correspond to v. 21?

There is a threefold pattern evident throughout the gospel of Matthew. We see it here again in vv. 21-26. In fact, seventy-five of Jesus' teachings in Matthew follow this same pattern.¹ Drawing from the following table, we can navigate the text and use it as a model of understanding this sequence.²

Traditional Righteousness	Vicious Cycle	Transforming Initiative
5:21	5:22	5:23-26
You shall not kill	Being angry, or saying You fool!	Go, be reconciled

The first part, v. 21, contains the 'Traditional Righteousness,' which explains the law and its implication as it was traditionally understood. The second part, verse 22, is the 'Vicious Cycle,' which explains the cycle of resulting sinful behavior that entrap us, such as anger and insults. Finally, the third part, v. 23-26, is the 'Transforming Initiative,' which is the culmination of Christ's teaching. Here we find the only imperatives, or commands, of these verses. The 'Transforming Initiative' is explained:

We mean this in three senses: it transforms the person who is angry into an active peacemaker; it transforms the relationship from one of anger in a peacemaking process; and it hopes to transform the enemy into a friend. Furthermore, it participates in the way of grace that God took in Jesus when there was enmity between God and humans: God came in Jesus to make peace... It invites us to deliverance from the vicious cycle of anger and insult.³

¹ As opposed to the two pattern of the 'antithesis' model.

² Stassen and Gushee, p. 135, 142.

³ Stassen & Gushee, p. 135.

? Do you find this perspective helpful? Why or why not?

? How does Jesus invite us into a way of transformation out of anger and insult?

? Can you think of a time when reconciliation has offered you a way of deliverance from the vicious cycles of anger and insult? Explain.

We now shift gears to study what Jesus has to say about our sexuality. This text is the second of six occasions where we find Jesus' words set beside the Old Testament law.

READ: Matthew 5:27-30

Once again, use this table showing the threefold pattern to help navigate the text.¹

Traditional Righteousness	Vicious Cycle	Transforming Initiative
5:27	5:28	5:29-30
You shall not commit adultery	Looking with lust; Adultery in the heart	Remove the cause of temptation

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 5:27

This is the sixth commandment (in Exodus 2:14, Deut. 5:18). The command obviously implies marriage. Where, exactly, do we find God prescribing marriage?² Read the following passages:

- Genesis 2:24

¹ Ibid, p. 142

² Are you confused by the presence of polygamy, concubines, etc., found in the Old Testament? You're not alone. These verses should help bring greater clarity.

- Matt.:19:4-6
- Mark 10:6-9

If you are single, male or female, you may think this section has no bearing for you, but keep reading. Where Jesus leads us with this command speaks to each and every one of us.

But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 5:28

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go to hell. 5:29-30

This is the third part of the pattern, which is the high point of Jesus' teaching. In these verses we find the practical component to breaking the cycle of lust in our lives. Jesus is giving us specific ways to fulfill the will of God. The first interpretive question of these verses is to evaluate the language Jesus is using. Do we take Jesus' words in a literal, face-value, sense? Is he using hyperbole?

How do we interpret Jesus' views on marriage, sex and the role of women from these verses? Read the following:

The crucial point in these passages is that Jesus breaks through all kinds of casuistry [clever but unsound reasoning], returning to the simple and unambiguous commandment of God. God created marriage as a permanent union between a man and a woman. It is God's will to protect marriage as his own institution. Therefore Jesus takes a clear stand against autonomous sexuality, and at the same time setting women free from their role as subservient objects of male desire.¹

? Since our culture peddles sexuality in order to sell everything, from cars to hamburgers, how are we to remove ourselves from temptation?² What are some practical steps we can take?

¹ Shrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament*; p. 98

² According to one study, over 14,000 sexual references are shown on TV per year, and the average person will view over 100,000 of those references in his or her lifetime --- and that's just TV!

APPLY:

Re-write vv. 23-26 in your own words. How can you apply and practice these commands in your own life? List some ideas and practice them this week.

What habits do you have that draw you into lustful thinking/desiring? There is power in writing them down and confessing them to God. There is even greater power in confessing to another brother/sister in Christ, and asking for accountability. Prayerfully consider what God may be asking you to do in this area.

FURTHER THOUGHTS:

(Jesus') whole life on earth was sadly associated with physical violence, from Bethlehem's slaughtered innocents to Calvary's crucified thieves. And his own experience was deliberately full of spiritual warfare, from the temptation in the wilderness to the agony in the garden. ...It was in and through this spiritual warfare that he made spiritual peace, peace between man and God. From that ultimate peace comes the other peace, peace between man and man. In our history it has been so. Not politics but sanctity abolished barbarism and slavery and snobbery. It is the long way round, but it is the surgeon's way: to deal with the root cause of the disease, not just the symptoms.¹

The massive unleashing of sexuality which is occurring in Western civilization is a reflection of cultural decline. It is well-known that an inverse relationship exists between indiscriminate sexual expression and cultural excellence. It is cause, therefore, for extreme alarm when an industry flourishes to the extent of billions of dollars annually whose product for distribution are sexually explicit depictions of the vilest debasement of women, men and children.²

The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your entire body will be full of light; but if your eye is unsound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the very light in you is darkened, how dense is that darkness! ---Matthew 6:22, 23

For more, see <http://sbcommunity.org/life/homegroups/>

¹ Kreeft, p.150

² Harold M. Voth, M.D., *The Psychological and Social Effects of Pornography* p. 8

Study Six

True to Our Word: Faithfulness in Speech and Marriage Matthew 5:31-37

PONDER: Think through your life as a believer. What are the areas where you have asked ethical questions based on what (how much) is “allowed,” or permissible, in God’s eyes? It could be questions regarding sex, wealth, justice issues – the list is endless. Be honest! Be honest!



READ:

- Matthew 5: 31-32
- Matthew 19:3-9
- Mark 10:2-12.

Write below the things that the Matthew 19 and Mark 10 passages add to the Sermon on the Mount text in chapter five.

You have heard it said... But I say to you... Referred to in theology as an *antithesis*, we see Jesus addressing Old Testament law, and adding a spin to it – a spin that does not cancel the law, but carries the law to its rightful home – in our hearts and attitudes. The first part of our text this week touches on a sensitive subject, that of divorce. If you are a child of divorce, been through a divorce yourself, or walked through painful seasons with a friend going through a divorce, then you know what it is to seek God’s answers at the most personal, and emotionally complex, level. Let’s keep in mind that Jesus’ teaching is not only intrinsically true, but also wholly compassionate. Let’s begin by looking together at the historical context of these verses...

Matthew 19:3 begins: *Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason?”* What we see here is Jesus being drawn into a religious debate that had been ongoing between two rival rabbinic schools – the followers of Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Shammai. Rabbi Shammai taught that divorce should be granted only for the most egregious matrimonial offences.¹ Rabbi Hillel, on the other hand, took a more liberal view of divorce, teaching that if *anything* displeased a husband about his wife (her appearance, her cooking – anything!), then he could dismiss her through divorce.² Dallas Willard writes:

*A man was generally thought to be righteous or good in the matter of divorce if, when he sent his wife away, he gave her a written statement that declared her to be divorced. She at least had, then, a certificate to prove her status as unmarried. This allowed her to defend herself against a charge of adultery if found with a man, for such a charge could result in her death. It also made it possible for her to seek marriage to another, or, if all else failed, to make her living as a prostitute.*³

In a word, divorce was brutal for women. Beyond the social injustice of it, however, lay the real reason the Pharisees wanted Jesus to enter the debate – they wanted him to take sides on one side of the law or the other.

Jesus responds. Read Matthew 19:4-6. Notice how Jesus did not answer the Pharisees’ question. *Whatever Jesus was saying, his focus was not laws and rules and their exceptions. He wants us to ask a different question.*⁴

? If you were on “Jeopardy,” you would take Jesus’ answer and frame the correct question. What is the essential question that Jesus wants us to ask here?

? As you read these verses from Matthew and Mark, what are the things you see Jesus speaking against? What are the core issues? Be specific.

¹ Rabbi Hillel taught from Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

² Women at this time did not have the social autonomy to seek a divorce for any reason.

³ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (Harper, San Francisco, 1998) p. 168

⁴ Stassen & Gushee, p. 274

? What is the flip side? What is Jesus encouraging us toward with respect to our view of marriage?

John Stott believes that Jesus replies to the Pharisees (Matthew 19) in three parts. Consider this 3-part dissent to their question:

1. *The Pharisees were preoccupied with the grounds for divorce; Jesus with the institution of marriage;*
2. *The Pharisees called Moses' provision for divorce a command; Jesus called it a concession to the hardness of human hearts;*
3. *The Pharisees regarded divorce lightly; Jesus took it so seriously that, with only one exception, he called all remarriage after divorce adultery.¹*

? What is your initial response to each of these three statements?

The odds are that #3 above, rocked our boats a bit. In a world where divorce and remarriage are exceedingly common, this hard-line statement may seem harsh to our ears.² However, this “exceptive clause” is not a *prescription* for divorce! Nowhere in Scripture do we see any kind of directive to seek divorce when infidelity has occurred. No mistake should be made between an *allowance* of divorce and a *prescription* for divorce.

? Do you know anyone (don't name names) whose marriage has weathered infidelity and survived? If so, what God-given qualities helped their marriage through such a desperate time?

To ask what criteria must be met in order to make divorce permissible is to ask the wrong question. In doing so, we place ourselves in the same position as the Pharisees. Jesus' main concern was, and is, the condition of our hearts. With

¹ Stott, pp. 94-95

² Interestingly, the Greek word used here is not *moicheia* (adultery), but *porneia* (fornication), which would cover any offense that might have a sexual basis.

respect to marriage, his sole concern is that marriage be lifted to the exalted place God intended for it. Consider the following:

The central purpose of marriage, as of all of life, is to seek first the reign of God. Disciples of Jesus Christ are to live not for themselves but for God and God's purposes. As in "regular" life, so in marriage --as spouses lay down their own lives for God and for each other, as they lose themselves in the way of the cross, they find the richest possible fulfillment in marriage. But if they make marriage solely an avenue for their own self-fulfillment, they are likely to find anything but fulfillment therein.¹

READ: Matthew 5:33-37²

? What overlapping themes do you see with this passage regarding oaths, and the passages we just read about divorce?

? Isn't it interesting how people, regardless of their belief, invoke the name of God in their speech ("I swear to God," "Honest to God," etc)? What do you think is at the bottom of this?

? Why does Jesus forbid this type of swearing, or oath-taking?

? In what ways do you think you violate what Jesus has to say about oaths? What practical changes can you make?

This week's text touches on two seemingly different subjects – divorce and oath-taking. However, the common theme running between the two is Jesus' challenge to live lives of faithfulness and integrity. Marriage is not to be treated lightly, solely as a means to our own happiness. The Pharisees' focus was on

¹ Stassen & Gushee, p. 275

² For an expanded perspective on these verses, read also Mt. 23:16-22

what was permissible with respect to divorce. Jesus essentially told them that they were missing the point. With respect to oath-taking, Jesus admonishes the Pharisees for using the name of God to bolster their own human (and often sinful) statements.

APPLY:

Taking these two sections of our text together, take your own “sincerity” temperature in light of what Jesus has to teach:

*What are some habits of integrity that you need to adopt? Formulate a plan, and ask a friend to hold you accountable.

*Whether you are married or unmarried, honestly look at your attitudes about marriage. Ask God to refine and shape them. Are there habits of thinking and/or speech that you need to change? Again, formulate a plan, write it down and commit it to prayer!

FURTHER THOUGHTS:

Legalism like the Pharisees’ will always fail, not because it is too strict but because it is not strict enough. Thunderously, inarguably, the Sermon on the Mount proves that before God we all stand on level ground: murderers and temper-throwers, adulterers and lusters, thieves and coveters. We are all desperate, and that is in fact the only state appropriate to a human being who wants to know God. Having fallen from the absolute Ideal, we have nowhere to land but in the safety net of absolute grace.¹

For more, see <http://sbcommunity.org/life/homegroups/>

¹ Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Zondervan, 1995) p. 144

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Seven
Transformation from Retaliation and Hate
Matthew 5:38-48

PONDER: Whether we like it or not, we are bombarded by violent images day in and day out. Violence is so ingrained in our culture, that it has even become part of our entertainment. How have you been impacted by our surrounding culture of violence? Using Psalm 139:23-24 as a guide, spend five minutes praying it before going on in this study:



Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my wicked thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

The transformation continues. We now come to the fifth and sixth of the so-called antitheses, the final two occasions when Jesus reinterprets the Law. In this section we find Jesus' clear teaching that love is to replace vengeance. It is quite possible that these are some of the most demanding of Jesus' teachings. We are challenged by them because our sinful nature demands recompense for any wrongs inflicted upon us. Consequently, we live in an entitled and litigious society – a culture of our own making which prizes personal "rights" above all.

READ: Matthew 5:38-48.

Again, let us reference this helpful table, which separates the text into the threefold pattern with which we have become familiar.¹

Traditional Righteousness	Vicious Cycle	Transforming Initiative
5:38	5:39	5:40-42
Eye for eye, tooth for tooth	Retaliating violently or revengefully, by evil means	Turn the other cheek, Give your tunic and cloak, Go the second mile, Give to beggar and borrower

¹ Stassen and Gushee, p. 137, 142.

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 5:38

It is interesting that Jesus is not referring to the Ten Commandments, but rather to rabbinic oral tradition. There are two possible sources for this reference: Exodus 21:22-23 and Deuteronomy 19:18b-21. Both are legal provisions for compensation of personal injury. Before you hit the snooze button, we can simplify the ethic at work. Basically the Old Testament law referenced here involved exact, legal retaliation for wrongs committed. Now let's look at what Jesus has to say about the issue.

But I say to you, Do not resist any evildoer. 5:39a

OR

Here's what I propose: 'Don't hit back at all.' The Message

OR

But I say to you, do not retaliate revengefully by evil means. Stassen & Gushee

Here again is Jesus' authority marker, *But I say to you*. The meaning hinges on the interpretation of the Greek for "evil," which we might translate "by evil means" or "the evil person." Do you see a difference of effect in each translation? One important factor in interpreting Scripture is not only looking at the immediate context of the verse, but also its wider context in Scripture. Let's bring in the next set of verses to explore which meaning is most likely intended.

But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. 5:39b-42¹

? Thinking through Jesus' life, do we find Jesus resisting evil? When?

? Let's look again at the wider context in the New Testament. Read the following verses. What is Paul's emphasis?

- Romans 12:17-21
- 1 Thessalonians 5:15

¹ These verses are astonishing because of their parallel to Isaiah 50:4-9. Read this passage. Do you see it? The Isaiah text contains the same words: resist, cheek, sue, coat, give and turn away. Certainly we can gather from both texts a foreshadowing of the crucifixion of Jesus.

Stassen and Gushee explain this alternate translation of verse 39a,

Usually it is translated, “do not resist evil.” But this seems wrong to anyone who thinks about it, because Jesus often resisted evil, confronting Pharisees who excluded the outcasts, Peter who told him not to suffer, the devil who tempted him not to follow God’s will, the wealthy who hoarded their possessions, and the disciples who lacked faith... this is not an impossible ideal of not resisting evil, but a naming of the vicious cycle of retaliation by violent, revengeful or evil means.¹

? Stop and think about this. What is the core challenge that Jesus is issuing in this teaching? How would you paraphrase what you have read to this point? Write this below.

Jesus not only refutes the exacting nature of justice under traditional rabbinic teaching; he issues the “cure” for this cycle of vengeful sin with a startling challenge. We are to love our enemies! Not only that, but he calls us to love them prayerfully.

Again, the table below can offer a useful view of the breakdown of 5:43-47.²

Traditional Righteousness	Vicious Cycle	Transforming Initiative
5:43	5:46-47	5:44-45
Love neighbor and hate enemy	Hating enemies is the same vicious cycle that you see in Gentiles and tax collectors	Love enemies, pray for your persecutors; be all inclusive as your Father in heaven is

You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 5:43

? Read Leviticus 19:17-18. What does the command actually say?

¹ Stassen and Gushee, p. 137-138, 142.

² Stassen and Gushee, p.140, 142.

? Not surprisingly, the word “neighbor” was thought to be simply a fellow Jew. How do you think Jesus is asking us to define “neighbor”?

*But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.
5:44-45*

? Are you guilty of only loving the loveable, and hating (or having contempt for) your enemies? In what ways? Get very specific here:

What makes Jesus’ command to love so challenging is that we are commanded to love the entire spectrum of people, from people we naturally love, to people for whom we have contempt, and everyone in between.

? When was the last time you prayed for an enemy? What effect did it have?

? If you find yourself having difficulty naming an enemy, think in terms of people who are different from you, or people whom you find it difficult to relate to. (When was the last time you prayed for militant Muslims, or others regarded as enemies of our country? When have you prayed for the homeless man or woman who asked you for money? When have you prayed for political candidates with whom you disagree? –Come up with a list of your own, but stretch your thinking to let the challenge sink in.)

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 and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 5:46-47

These verses make clear the charge that we are caught in a vicious cycle. We often tend to love those we know, who are similar to us and who love us in return. Jesus' illustration referencing tax collectors and Gentiles is a strong rebuke to his listeners: even they love those who love them. Is our love conditional like Jesus' listeners? We might get stuck here, but remember, the transforming initiative Jesus offers us is to love and pray for our enemies and those who persecute us (v. 44-45).

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. 5:48

Don't give up here. If the weight of the Sermon is intense, you might just be getting the impact of Jesus' teachings.

? What kind of "perfection" is being commanded here?

Let's take a look at the definition of the term "perfect," and the setting in which we are reading it. Read these two references from the Old Testament that use this same term for perfection, *teleios*. What do you find?

- Leviticus 19:1-2
- Deuteronomy 18:13

What if the term actually means *complete* or *all-inclusive* in this context?¹ Think through what Jesus has been teaching to this point.

- Quickly resolve your anger and be reconciled;
- Control lust by removing the cause of temptation;
- Maintain fidelity in marriage;
- Use language of integrity;
- Abandon violence and retaliation; and
- Love and pray for your enemy.

¹ Stassen and Gushee, p. 141.

The point is that the community of Jesus' disciples is summoned to the task of showing forth the character of God. That character is nowhere more decisively manifest than in the practice of loving enemies. Those who are peacemakers are to be called 'sons of God' because, like God, they love their enemies. Thus, the church's embodiment of nonviolence is – according to the Sermon on the Mount – its indispensable witness to the gospel.¹

If you think Jesus has forgotten who we are, look back over the Beatitudes. These are the people who will receive the fullness of God. Jesus offers us ways of deliverance from our cycles of sin, to be a part of his kingdom of love and peace. To be salt, light, a city on a hill!

APPLY:

The main theme of these verses is love. We are challenged to fight against our cycles of “justifiable” retaliation and conditional love and to be transformed by Jesus to love all people, in all circumstances. What does it look like to be complete, or all-inclusive, in our love? You probably had some individuals (or groups of people) come to mind as you worked through this study. Make a list of those people towards whom your heart needs to soften. Commit to pray for them!

Is our nation caught in a “cycle of retaliation by violent, revengeful or evil means”?² Why is this, and what can we do about it on a personal level?

¹ Hays, p. 329.

² Are you aware of what our nation spends on defense each year? Estimates of over \$1 trillion reflect what is budgeted and what later comes through in appropriations bills.

FURTHER THOUGHTS:

As long as you are tangled in wrong and revenge, blow and counterblow, aggression and defense, you will be constantly drawn into fresh wrong. Only forgiveness frees us from the injustice of others.¹

To bless the people who have oppressed our spirits, emotionally deprived us, or in other ways handicapped us, is the most extraordinary work any of us will ever do.²

For more, see <http://sbcommunity.org/life/homegroups/>

Sermon Notes. . .

¹ Romano Guardini, *The Lord* (Regnery Gateway, Chicago, 1954), p.302

² Elizabeth O'Connor, *Cry Pain*, p.50

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Eight
Disciplines Before God
Matthew 6:1-6

PONDER: “To desire a spiritual life is, thus, to desire discipline.” Thomas Merton¹ What does this mean? Write out your explanation.



We have just finished studying the six antitheses, in which Jesus addresses the Old Testament interpretations of the law held by the scribes and Pharisees. In 5:20 Jesus calls us to a righteousness greater than the self-righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. We now turn to three aspects of living out our faith before God: giving, prayer and fasting.²

READ: Matthew 6:1-6.

Once again, if it helps, use the following table to break down these verses.³

Traditional Righteousness	Vicious Cycle	Transforming Initiative
6:2	6:1-2	6:3-4
When you give	Practicing righteousness for show	But give in secret, and your Father will reward you

Be careful not to do your “acts of righteousness” before men, 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 men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 6:1-2

Jesus immediately begins with a warning that we are *not* to practice our disciplines of faith in order to be seen. In these verses the traditional righteousness Jesus addresses is giving, specifically the giving of our money. Notice the phrasing of verse two. It is clear Jesus assumes that as disciples we will give. The Greek word for giving, *eleemosune*, does not necessarily mean a

¹ Merton, *No Man Is An Island*, p. 112.
² We will look more at prayer in Study 9.
³ Stasson and Gushee, p. 142.

“tithe,” but rather “a giving to charity,” or, “a deed of mercy or pity.”¹ From this, we can understand that Jesus expects us to continually give gifts of mercy to those in need.

? Look up this Old Testament passage regarding instructions for giving: Deut. 15:7-11. What is striking about this text? How are we to give?

? Most of us probably do not sound a trumpet on our way to giving to charity. (Do any of us even own a trumpet?) Can you image how absurd this would be if someone did this? Do we give out of a desire for human recognition? What is the cycle of sin Jesus is condemning?

? How do you seek the recognition of others in your practices of faith? In what areas of your Christian life are you most vulnerable?

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. 6:3-4

? Jesus counters the “righteousness for the self” with a somewhat curious prescription for how we are to give. What does it mean for our left hand not to know what our right hand is doing?

¹ Willard, p. 193; Stott, 128.

Dallas Willard observes that our initial attempts to keep our “left hand” from knowing what our “right hand” is doing will fail.¹ In other words, the beginning of any new discipline requires mental effort. However, over time, that discipline becomes ingrained to the extent that it becomes reflexive. Here is an illustration:

If you have tried playing a musical instrument, say piano or guitar, you know that you have to initially think intently about what your hands are doing. But over time, and through practice, there is a transformation as your hands come to move independently of your conscious thought. Your hands move as a reflex. With this illustration we may be hitting on what it means to keep our “left hand” from knowing what our “right hand” is doing. Our heart becomes so transformed by Jesus that our actions become reflex. Our heart is lifted and inspired by the movement of God in us, and our response to him is automatic.

? Has regular, disciplined giving become a reflex for you, or do you struggle with this habit? Explain.

Now we move on to the next aspect of living out our faith before God. You will notice that verses 5-6 are structured in parallel with verses 1-4. Use the table below to see the progression of Jesus’ teaching on prayer.²

Traditional Righteousness	Vicious Cycle	Transforming Initiative
6:5	6:5	6:6
When you pray	Practicing righteousness for show	But pray in secret, and your Father will reward you

And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 6:5

As before, Jesus begins by warning that we are *not* to practice our discipline of prayer in order to be seen. Jesus is obviously not prohibiting public prayer. He prays with his disciples, and teaches them to pray the Lord’s Prayer, which begins, “*Our Father in heaven...*” What Jesus is, however, targeting in this teaching is the practice of praying flowery, self-righteous prayers in public *in order to be seen by men*, and not for the purpose of seeking God.

¹ Willard, p. 192.

² Stassen and Gushee, p. 142

? In verses 2 and 5, what does Jesus mean when he says the hypocrites “have received their reward”?

But when you pray, go into your room, close your door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 6:6

? Is there a contradiction between these teachings and the “city on a hill” teaching in 5:13-16? Explain your answer.

Respond to the following quote.

*The teaching is not that we should hide our good deeds. That might be appropriate in some cases, but it is not Jesus’ point. There is nothing inherently wrong with their being known. Just as in the case of “adultery of the heart,” the issue here is one of intents and purposes. Not did we look at someone and sexually desire them, as we have seen, but did we look at someone in order to sexually desire them. And now: not are we seen doing a good deed, but are we doing a good **deed in order to be seen**.¹*

? In verses 4 and 6 Jesus stresses that our actions of giving and praying are to be done in secret. He promises that God will reward us. What kind of reward is Jesus talking about?

¹ Willard, p.190.

APPLY:

The primary intent of these teachings is to practice our giving and private prayer before God alone and not for recognition before others. Let us now reflect on some secondary considerations:

Examine your motives in practicing the disciplines of prayer and giving. Many of us fall in and out of regular discipline. We may have seasons of regular fasting, study of Scripture, giving to those in need, or meditative prayer. What season are you in now? What discipline have you contemplated for some time, but have yet to undertake?

What are your financial giving habits? How much do you give? How often do you give? Do you give before or after you have paid your bills? Share this area of life with your homegroup!

What are your disciplines of prayer? Do you set daily time aside? Do you pray Scripture? What are your habits? Again, share these things with your homegroup, and encourage one another toward growth in this area.

FURTHER THOUGHTS:

If there were more encouragement going around, perhaps we would be looking less for recognition and acceptance.

It is our human cowardice which made him say, 'Let your light shine before men,' and our human vanity which made him tell us to beware of practicing our piety before men... Our good works must be made public so that our light shines; our religious devotions must be secret lest we boast about them. Besides, the end of both instructions of Jesus is the same, namely the glory of God.¹

¹ Stott, p. 127

And...

Charity—giving to the poor—is an essential part of Christian morality ... I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them.¹

For more, see <http://sbcommunity.org/life/homegroups/>

Sermon Notes. . .

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 81-82

Study Nine

Praying the Way of Jesus

Matthew 6:7-18

PONDER: What are the components of a healthy prayer life? Think about both attitudes and practices, and list them here:



READ: Matthew 6:7-18

The disciples of Jesus were witness to many things. They saw healings, deliverance from demons, and they heard the best teaching in history! They also watched as their Messiah, regularly and repeatedly, withdrew from the

crowds in order to pray to his heavenly Father. The communion between Father and Son in prayer must have intrigued and drawn them, because they ask him, *Lord teach us how to pray*. In order to teach his disciples (and us) how to pray, Jesus sets up a study of contrasts. He shows us how to pray, and how *not* to pray.¹ Write down the contrasts you see:

Don't do

Do

John Stott writes:

Hypocrisy is not the only sin to avoid in prayer; 'vain repetition' or meaningless, mechanical utterance is another. The former is the folly of the Pharisee, the latter of the Gentile or pagan. Hypocrisy is a misuse of the purpose of prayer (diverting it from the glory of God to the glory of self); verbosity is a misuse of the very nature of prayer (degrading it from a real and personal approach to God into a mere recitation of words). We see...that the method of Jesus is to paint a vivid contrast between two alternatives, in order to indicate his way the more plainly.²

¹ The Pharisees and pagans provide Jesus' example of how *not* to approach prayer.

² Stott, p. 142

? In vv. 9-14, Jesus shows us his way of prayer. Commonly called “The Lord’s Prayer,” Jesus gives us a prayer to pray as it is, or to use as a pattern and model. Break down this prayer into parts. List the categories, or themes that you find.

The symmetry of God’s word is breathtaking! In the Beatitudes, we see nine attributes Jesus calls us to as his followers. The first four emphasize our relationship with God, and the remaining five emphasize our relationships to one another.¹ The Ten Commandments have a similar format; the first half of these laws focus on our relationship to God, and the second half focuses on our treatment of our fellow human beings.²

? Now look at the Lord’s Prayer. Where do you see the same shift?

Richard Fosters writes:

The Lord’s Prayer is essentially petitionary – asking. Adoration is present at both the beginning and the end, but petition is present through the main body of the prayer. Of its seven perfectly crafted requests, three relate to personal petition. These three entreaties can be gathered up into three words: “give,” “forgive,” and “deliver.” Together they form a paradigm for Petitionary Prayer by which we can conjugate all the verbs of our individual asking.³

Give us this day our daily bread...

? Think about the things you ask God to give you. How does Jesus’ model inform your prayer life with respect to what you ask?

¹ Matthew 5:3-11

² Exodus 20:3-17

³ Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home*, (Harper, San Francisco, 1982), p. 185

? In many respects, “daily bread” seems trivial against the backdrop of huge spiritual themes playing through Scripture. What does this communicate to you about God’s heart for you? What kinds of requests do you withhold from God because you think they seem insignificant?

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

? Notice (no matter what translation you read) that this is a conditional request. God’s forgiveness of us is predicated on our forgiveness of others. Really think through this. Why do you think this is so?

? St. Augustine said, *God gives where he finds empty hands.*¹ How might this apply to forgiveness?

When we reflect on the word “forgiveness” as it applies to our human relationships, we often think of it as an event fixed in time. If you have experienced the costly work of forgiveness in your own life, then you know that there is often a transitional moment you can point to and say, “I came to a place where I realized... and then I simply forgave him/her...” True forgiveness, however, is the *ongoing* work of God in our hearts – a work that involves abandoning our “rights” out of trust that He will set things right; and a deepening awareness of God’s forgiveness of *me*, as I do the work of forgiving *others*. In other words, forgiveness, as intended by God, is the attitude of grace through which all individual acts of forgiveness originate.

? What is the state of your own heart with respect to grace and forgiveness? Where do you need to confess and to grow?

¹ As quoted in C.S. Lewis, *Letters to an American Lady* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1969), p.73

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

This third petition contains both a negative (*lead us not into temptation*), and a positive (*but deliver us from evil*). What does this mean? How could God lead us into temptation? Before you jump into an answer, consider that the Greek word used for “temptation” means “trials” or “trying circumstances.” Richard Foster says, “...*the only time God tries us is when there is something in our hearts that needs revealing.*”¹

? Have you ever experienced a time when you felt that God was specifically “trying” you? What did this refining process reveal?

Psalm 139:23-24 says:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

? How do we reconcile the request in the Lord’s Prayer (*lead us not into temptation*), and the request in Ps. 139 (*test me*)?

Again, Foster comments:

*Therefore the prayer “lead us not into temptation” means this: “Lord, may there be nothing in me that will force you to put me to the test in order to reveal what is in my heart.” We want to be progressing in the realms of transformation with no hidden sins so that God will not be forced to put us to the test.*²

Re-read vv. 16-18.

To amplify his criticism of the self-righteous attention-seeking of the Pharisees, Jesus gives a final caution with respect to fasting. His words may seem curious to us, but would have been very familiar within the context of Jewish culture. It was common, during the dry season especially, for Jews (religious leaders in particular) to fast twice a week. This fasting was considered a righteous act and included abstention from all pleasures, including anointing hair and skin with oil.

¹ Foster, p. 189

² Foster, p.

In a dry climate, during a dry season, the avoidance of this would make a “faster” obvious to others.

? Think about some of your “acts of righteousness.” In what areas are you particularly susceptible to seeking the attention of others?

Jesus does not set out here to share a detailed perspective on fasting, aside from the fact that it is to be in secret, between us and God. However, it is assumed in this passage that we will fast.

? Do you fast for spiritual reasons?¹ Why? Why not? If you have incorporated fasting into your walk with Christ, share with your homegroup some of the benefits you have enjoyed.

The purpose of fasting can be multi-faceted. We may choose to fast in order to break down an idol—an area of life that has become increasingly important in an unhealthy way—or we may choose to fast in order to gain perspective on an issue that God is revealing to us. Whatever the reason may be, the ultimate goal of fasting is to intensify our focus on God.

John Piper writes:

If you don't feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is not because you have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because you have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Your soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great.²

Throughout this week's text, Jesus is calling our attention to the motives behind our worship. Do we pray verbose and lofty prayers for the approval of others? Do we serve and sacrifice in order to make ourselves look good? The answer is probably “yes” to both, at one time or another. Praise God that he sees us and knows our humanity. Praise Him further that he calls us to a higher ideal, to worship Him in spirit and in truth!

¹ We make a mistake to assume we cannot fast because we can't go without food for a whole day. We are all able to fast from *something!*

² John Piper, *A Hunger for God* (Crossway Books, 1997), p.23

APPLY:

Write out the Lord's Prayer in your own words. Pray each part of it deliberately, and take your time! Try to pray it every day for a week, and watch expectantly to see how God uses it in your life.

Consider fasting in order to focus on prayer. Only you and God know the thing you need to fast from. Seek Him for that, and ask Him what you need to be praying about. You might already know. Find some Scriptures that will help you pray along those lines.

FURTHER THOUGHTS:

*Master, they say that when I seem
To be in speech with you,
Since you make no replies, it's all a dream
---One talker aping two.*

*They are half right, but not as they
Imagine; rather, I
Seek in myself the things I meant to say,
And lo! The wells are dry.*

*Then, seeing me empty, you forsake
The Listener's role, and through
My dead lips breathe and into utterance wake
The thoughts I never knew.*

*And thus you neither need reply
Nor can; thus, while we seem
Two talking, thou art One forever, and I
No dreamer, but thy dream.¹*

For more, see <http://sbcommunity.org/life/homegroups/>

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Poems*, "Prayer" pp. 122-123

Study Ten
The Root of Our Dedication
Matthew 6:19-34

PONDER: We live in a capitalistic, consumer-based economy. The advertising world is dedicated to convincing us that we do not have what we “need.” Consequently, there is widespread poverty in the midst of unparalleled wealth and, in the midst of wealth, there is lack of contentment. What is your perspective on material possessions? Are you content with little? Are you OK with having a lot, and uncomfortable with Jesus’ teachings regarding wealth? Think about it and be honest.



Against the backdrop of the Lord’s Prayer, we enter into the third major section of the Sermon. This collection of verses, 6:19-34, teaches a new kind of economics –the economy of a life built on trust in God, rather than trust in material “security.” Once again, Jesus doesn’t simply address external behaviors, but goes straight to the heart of the matter by inserting into the middle of his teaching the importance of having healthy eyes –vision that is trained on God, not preoccupations with material needs and wants.

READ: Matthew 6:19-34

The following table shows the progression of Jesus’ teaching on treasures, the first of two themes in this section.¹

Traditional Righteousness	Vicious Cycle	Transforming Initiative
6:19a	6:19b	6:20-21
Do not store up treasures on earth	Moth and rust destroy, and thieves break in and steal	But store up treasures in heaven

¹ Stassen and Gushee, p. 142.

Re-read 6:19-23

? What are the two commands from Jesus in these verses?

? What does it mean to “store up treasures in heaven”? Make a list of at least 5 actions that Jesus prescribes in order to counteract the temptation to store up our treasures on earth. For help, consult Matthew 25:31-46 (focus on vs. 35-37). How can we do this together, as a community?

? The justification for Jesus’ teaching is based on the corrosive nature of possessions, and their susceptibility to theft. This teaching has been interpreted by some to mean that we should reject private property and possessions in general. What specifically is Jesus prohibiting?

? Do you have trouble reconciling the idea of financial or material provision with being a disciple of Jesus? Is this teaching a prohibition against saving or investment? Read the following verses. How do they help your understanding?

- 1 Timothy 4:4-5
- Proverbs 6:6
- 1 Timothy 5:8

In verse 21 Jesus proclaims that our attitude toward “treasures” in our lives is reflective of what lies in our hearts.¹ He uses “vision” as an illustration of how we perceive the distinction between true security in God, and temporary securities in the world, saying in vv. 22-23, *The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are*

¹ The eye and the heart are used interchangeably throughout scripture. As one example, read Psalm 119.

good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! In Jewish teaching the “evil eye” meant stinginess and greed and the “healthy eye” represented generosity.¹

Consider the following:

A genuinely “impossible ideal” would be to do what so many (including Christians) in wealthy cultures such as our own do: piling up wealth and extravagant possessions for themselves while at the same time claiming to give as generously to the needy as they “can,” and living extravagantly while claiming not to be affected by such spending choices in their “hearts.” Jesus’ teaching is far more realistic: invest your possessions generously in God’s reign of justice and mercy, and you will find your heart is invested there as well.²

? How do we cultivate a faithful response to what we have, or what we will acquire? In terms of personal economics (spending, saving, etc.) how can you cultivate a faithful response? Be practical in your response and discuss with your homegroup.

The second theme of this text concerns the root of our dedication and drive by asking who is our master. Again, the following table provides help seeing the progression.³

Traditional Righteousness	Vicious Cycle	Transforming Initiative
6:24	6:24-25	6:33-34
No one can serve two masters	Serving God and wealth, worrying about food and clothing	But seek first God’s reign and God’s justice/righteousness

Using the language of slave and master, Jesus makes sure we know what is at stake. Looking at verse 24, notice what we “can” and “cannot” do. We cannot simultaneously serve God and wealth.⁴ If our starting point concerns how to fit

¹ Gundry, 113-114.

² Stassen and Gushee, p. 411.

³ Stassen and Gushee, p. 142

⁴ Your translation may read “mammon,” which is the transliteration of the Aramaic word for wealth. (Stott, 158)

God into our lives we have got it wrong. God as master means fitting our entire lives around him.

? Think critically – with what are you “preoccupied?” Who is your master? What is the drive behind your actions and pursuits?

Re-read 6:25-34

The word “therefore” always infers a conclusion to the teaching or argument previously stated. Accordingly, Jesus uses “therefore” in verse 25. Looking back, Jesus has taught us to store our treasures in heaven and, implicitly, to choose God as our master. Now, Jesus spends the next eight verses inviting us to think through the foundation of this teaching: Our heavenly Father is a trustworthy provider!

? There are three prohibitions stated in the negative (vs. 25-34). What are they?

The term used in v. 30, *oligopistoi*, meaning “little faiths,” occurs ten times throughout the Gospels. Willard comments that the term *may have been a nickname he invented as a way of gently chiding his apprentices for their lack of confidence in God...*¹ Verse 32 states, *...your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things*. Remember the Lord’s Prayer. In verse 8 Jesus prefaces the Prayer by saying *...your heavenly Father knows what you need before you ask him*. In the Prayer he tells us to ask for what we need, *Give us this day our daily bread* (v. 11). Why does Jesus include this? Precisely because we are *oligopistio* – “little faiths.” We get caught in a cycle of anxious worrying. Interestingly, Jesus says three times, *Do not worry*. God knows not only what we need, he also knows our emotional tendencies. Thankfully, we are not left to our own devices; Jesus tells us how to be transformed.

? How can you strive first for God’s kingdom and his righteousness at work, on campus, or wherever you find yourself? Discuss, challenge and encourage each other in your homegroup.

¹ Willard, p. 211.

The illustrations of birds, flowers and grass exhibit God's care for his creation. Jesus' point is to demonstrate that we have every reason to be confident in God. This is what the text is about. But these illustrations can also be informative for *how* we live. The observation of the birds reveal that they simply take what they need as they need it, and take only what is readily available to them.¹

? What does living *simply* mean to you?

? Another secondary thought from this text involves God's care of creation. If God cares for the birds, and if he cares even for the grass of the field, shouldn't his children do the same? What specific, practical things are you doing to be a good steward of God's creation?

? What does Jesus assume in verse 34?

It is certainly possible to read this text with a certain cynicism. We can observe from the world that there are many people --even people who faithfully follow Jesus-- who do not have their needs meet. While the problem is complex, Stott offers a sensible understanding:

...The most basic cause of hunger is not a cause of inadequate divine provision, but an inequitable human distribution... men hoard or spoil or waste these resources, and do not share them out. It seems significant that in this same Gospel of Matthew the Jesus who here says that our heavenly Father feeds and clothes his children, later says that we must ourselves feed the hungry and clothe the naked, and will be judged accordingly. It is always important to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. The fact that God feeds and clothes his children does not exempt us from the responsibility of being the agents through whom he does it.²

¹ Willard, p. 210.

² Stott, p. 167.

The foundational teaching of these verses is to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Jesus tells us we have every reason to be confident in God, our master. While this section concerns primarily the economic and material component of our lives, Jesus' main emphasis is on where we place our trust. The root of our dedication is to be God, our trustworthy heavenly Father, whose provision is eternal.

APPLY:

One billion people in our world live in substandard housing without clean water or adequate sanitation. One in seven people of the world go to bed hungry each night. The Gross Domestic Product of the poorest 48 nations, which is a quarter of the world's countries, is less than the combined wealth of the world's three richest people.¹

Consider first, taking on one of the following personal challenges in order to identify with the majority of the earth's population:

Fast for a day from media: TV, radio, e-mail, Ipod.

Fast from purchasing any non-essential products.

Fast for a day from gas-powered transportation: walk, ride a bike

Fast for a week from eating out.

For a further challenge, calculate the money you saved from fasting from any/all of the above, and send that money to a ministry that helps feed and clothe the poor.

How can we participate in economic justice in our world? Are there ministries, projects, certain people, etc. that your homegroup could partner with in order to "store up treasures in heaven"? Share with your group what *you* are involved in and where you can grow *together*. Challenge and encourage each other.

¹ <http://www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/Facts.asp>

Webercise: To further pursue social and economic justice, areas that include the wealth/poverty gap, debt repayment by poor countries, trade inequality and fair trade, the disproportionate allocation of resources, child labor and worker exploitation, and many other global issues visit these websites to gain a better understanding and learn how to become involved:

bread.org (Bread for the World)
globalissues.org (Online Resource)
one.org (ONE)
data.org (Debt Aids Trade Africa)
unicefusa.org (United Nations Children's Fund)
wr.org (World Relief)
ijm.org (International Justice Mission)

FURTHER THOUGHTS:

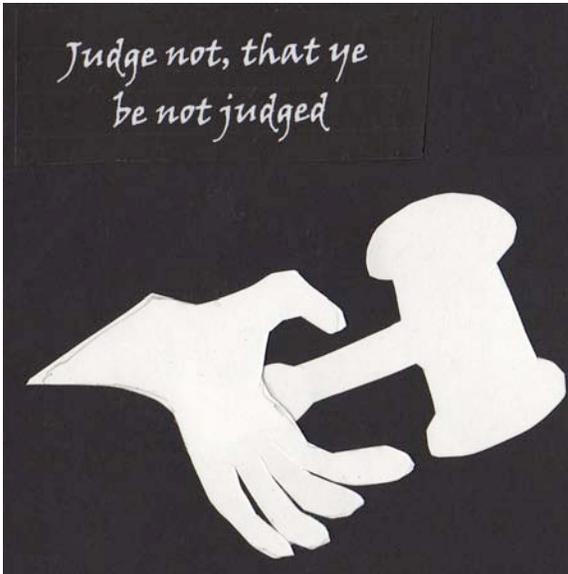
Be not anxious! Earthly possessions dazzle our eyes and delude us into thinking that they can provide security and freedom from anxiety. Yet all the time they are the very source of all anxiety. If our hearts are set on them, our reward is an anxiety whose burden is intolerable. Anxiety creates its own treasures and they in turn beget further care. When we seek for security in possessions we are trying to drive out care with care and the net result is the precise opposite of our anticipations. The fetters which bind us to our possessions prove to be cares themselves.¹

For more, see <http://sbcommunity.org/life/homegroups/>

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (SCM Press, 1959)

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Eleven Relationships Transformed Matthew 7:1-12



PONDER: Before you open your Bible, define three words: *judgment*, *condemnation* and *tolerance*. First, define them in your own words and then, if you want to get a dictionary, go ahead and do so.

- Judgment:
- Condemnation:
- Tolerance:

READ: Matthew 7:1-12

As you read through the text for this week, you will probably notice that there is little flow to it. Chapter 7 of the Sermon on the Mount almost seems to contain several separate “mini-sermons.” Commentators have different opinions regarding how these teachings are assembled. But if we pay close attention, there is a common thread running through all of them. That common thread is Jesus’ attention on relationships.

Having taught his disciples what Christian character is to look like, Jesus illustrates the impact of Christian character on community. What should it look like? How are we to behave? What are our attitudes with respect to our Christian brothers and sisters? What should our attitudes be towards those who oppose our faith?

Consider the network of relationships Jesus calls us to which Jesus calls us:

1. *to our brother, in whose eye we may discern a splinter, and whom we have a responsibility to help, not judge (1-5);*
2. *to a group startlingly designated “dogs” and “pigs.” They are people all right, but such is their animal nature that we are told not to share God’s gospel with them (6);*
3. *to our heavenly Father to whom we come in prayer, confident that he will give us nothing but “good things” (7-11); and*

4. *to everybody in general: the Golden Rule should guide our attitude and behavior towards them (12).*¹

As we go through this week's study, let's approach it using the above outline as our frame.

Our attitude toward Christian brothers and sisters

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. (7:1-2)

? In our time, the word "judge" carries connotations that may color how we interpret this passage. Write down your initial interpretation of these verses. Paraphrase them into your own words and share them with your homegroup.

At the beginning of our study this week (under "Ponder") you were asked to define 3 words. The first two, *judgment* and *condemnation*, are sometimes used interchangeably. Our text today is a case in point. The Greek word used here for "judge" is *krino*, which generally implies a condemnatory stance on the faults of others.

Read the following verses:

- Romans 2:1-4
- 1 Cor. 4:5
- James 4:12

? What do these verses add to your understanding of Jesus' prohibition against judgment?

¹ Stott, p. 174

Is Jesus asking us to simply accept the faults of others? Consider John Stott's perspective:

...the command to "judge not" is not a requirement to be blind, but rather a plea to be generous. Jesus does not tell us to cease to be men (by suspending our critical powers which help to distinguish us from animals) but to renounce the presumptuous ambition to be God (by setting ourselves up as judges).¹

Now, re-visit your definition of *tolerance*. The word, by itself, has a connotation of "bite-the-bullet-acceptance." When you add the spin of our own culture, it takes on the connotation of an all-embracing "live and let live" philosophy. In this passage Jesus is telling us that's not good enough. He calls us to much, much more!

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (7:3-5)

? In these verses, what does Jesus call us to do before we do anything else? Why does he ask this?

? Fill in the missing words: Verse 5 tells us that we need to take the plank out of our own eye so that we can _____ to take the speck from our brother's eye.

? What does this tell you about the value of self-examination first? Can you think of an example from your own life? Is this a discipline we can foster? If so, how?

Our attitude toward the "dogs" and "pigs"

Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces. (7:6)

¹ Stott, p. 177

? There is no doubt that these are harsh words coming from the lips of Jesus. What kind of person would merit these titles?¹ To whom, do you think, is Jesus referring?²

As you think about this question, consider one commentator's observation:

*God's gifts are not to be laid open to abuse, or his truth to mockery. There is a right discrimination which is different from the censorious judging of vv. 1-2.*³

How are we to interpret this? Do these verses mean that, if we *suspect* the gospel might be mocked, we should avoid sharing it? Probably not. What it does mean is that our evangelistic efforts at sharing the gospel should have a discriminatory element. There are those who are openly hostile to the way of Jesus. We are implicitly counseled here to be wise with our time and protective of God's truth.

? Surely we can all think of a person or two who has continually heard the truth of Jesus, and repeatedly chosen to reject it.⁴ At what point do we, humbly and soberly, decide to "step away"?

Our attitude toward our heavenly Father

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (7:7-11)

¹ For us, to be called a "dog" or "pig" would be an insult, but not nearly to the degree it would have been in Jesus' day. Jesus chose two animals that were considered the most "unclean" by Jewish custom. Dogs were not pets. Dogs roamed the dumps, and fed on the remains of carcasses and rubbish. Likewise, pigs were fed garbage, and eating them was strictly prohibited.

² For help with this, take a look at Proverbs 9:8, and consider other proverbs that contrast the wise man with the foolish man.

³ R.T. France, *Matthew* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, IVP, 1985), p.144

⁴ Read Acts 18:5-6. Even Paul includes an example from his own ministry.

? *Ask, seek, knock.* All are metaphors for prayer. All are given in the present tense, signifying an ongoing persistent action. What is your “persistence index” in prayer? (How well do you hang in there with prayers that go unanswered for long periods of time?)

? Do you pray “safe” prayers in order to keep from being disappointed with God, or do you boldly call on his power? Think honestly about this, and discuss with your homegroup.

? How do you respond to vv. 9-11? Do you pray with confidence in God’s fatherly love for you? Why (why not)?

? What do you think is meant here by “good things”?

Our attitude towards everyone in general

In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. (7:12)

To say one statement “sums up the Law and the Prophets,” is to say quite a bit. We know, however, that this one sentence from Jesus’ teaching has been quoted---and taught--- by Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and atheists alike. To “visualize world peace” as the bumper sticker says, might be putting the cart before the horse. Perhaps the starting point for world peace is truly this “Golden Rule.” Visualize everyone living it!

APPLY:

-Think of a “pattern” of judgment that you apply to others in your life. It may be a bias against certain behaviors or attitudes. (Really think about it!) Take time to confess this and ask for a softening of your heart. If you have acted on this judgment, and need to ask the forgiveness of another, do so this week if you can.

-Are there things that occupy your heart and mind that you withhold from God in prayer? List them, and give them over to His care. There is nothing too small, nothing too great, and nothing too sinful that He cannot carry it.

-Look this week for opportunities to live out this “Golden Rule.” Write down some of these situations and how God changed your heart because of your obedience to this teaching.

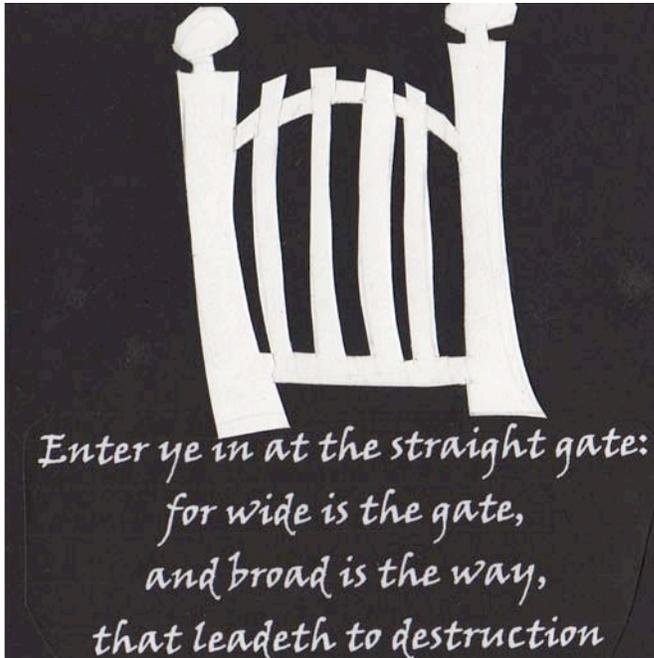
FURTHER THOUGHTS:

Attack me, I do this myself, but attack me rather than the path I follow and which I point out to anyone who asks me where I think it lies. If I know the way home and am walking along it drunkenly, is it any less the right way because I am staggering from side to side! If it is not the right way, then show me another way; but if I stagger and lose the way, you must help me, you must keep me on the true path, just as I am ready to support you. Do not mislead me, do not be glad that I have got lost, do not shout out joyfully: Look at him! He said he was going home, but there he is crawling into a bog!” No, do not gloat, but give me your help and support. ---Leo Tolstoy¹

For more, see <http://sbcommunity.org/life/homegroups/>

¹ A.N. Wilson, *The Lion and the Honeycomb: the Religious Writings of Leo Tolstoy*, (Harper & Row, San Francisco) p. 148

Study Twelve
Living the Truth, Discerning the Lies
Matthew 7:13-20



PONDER ... the number of stores that line our streets, the aisles within those stores, and the volume of brands within those aisles. We are bombarded with consumer choices. Simultaneously, we receive messages through advertising and other media that choice is our “right.” We deserve to have as many of them as possible! Think about your own life. Does having a wide variety of choices simplify or complicate things for you? Why or why not? How do you think the expectation of many choices has affected our spiritual worldview as a culture?

READ: Matthew 7:13-14

If we look at the Sermon on the Mount as a whole, we can see that Jesus has presented us with choices throughout. He teaches us how to be his followers by presenting us with contrasts. We can give to the needy with a great show of grandiosity, or we can choose Jesus’ way by giving with quiet humility that draws no attention to ourselves. We can fast and pray, letting everyone know how “holy” we are, or we can seek God with sincerity of heart. We can store up treasures – either earthly toys and fat bank accounts, or the treasure of lives transformed by Christ now, with the promise of eternal life to come.

All of our reading in the Sermon on the Mount comes to a culmination in the text for this week and next. In a way, Jesus has been taking us on a path, and pointing out things on one side of the path and its opposing side. In vv. 13 and 14, he brings us to a fork in the road -- the fork in the road. From here, we choose which way we go. Do we choose to go in the direction of popular culture, or do we choose to take the counter-cultural way of Jesus?

? As you read vv. 13-14, write down some of the distinctions you see between the two gates and the two roads:

Gates:

Roads:

Some commentators believe that the narrow gate represents belief in the risen Christ as the only way to God. In other words, not every truth claim will fit through the door.

? How would you articulate a convincing argument for absolute truth to a friend who takes a more all-inclusive approach to spiritual belief?

We're told that the road which leads to life is narrow, *and very few find it*. Consider the following response:

*This is a terrifying warning, and one that makes no sense if the Christian faith is understood merely or even primarily as **intellectual assent** to convictions about Jesus **an inspiring and encouraging personal relationship** with him, or as a **forensic transaction gaining us admission to heaven**.¹ (emphasis added)*

? Three options are presented here: a faith built only on intellectual agreement; faith built only on personal encouragement; and faith built solely on a fear of hell. Where do you find yourself on this spectrum? Explain.

Consider John Stott's comment on these verses:

What is striking about these verses is the absolute nature of the choice before us. We would all prefer to be given many more choices than only one, or better still to fuse them all into a conglomerate religion, thus eliminating the need for any choice. But Jesus cuts across our easy-going

¹ Stassen & Gushee p. 485

syncretism¹. He will not allow us the comfortable solutions we propose. Instead he insists that ultimately there is only one choice, because there are only two possibilities to choose from.²

READ: Matthew 7:15-20

The ongoing nature of the Christian faith is that we may choose the narrow path of following Jesus, but we will still face the allure and the hazards of living in a world of temptations. Perhaps the most insidious temptation we face as believers is the temptation of “easy” theologies --teachings that wear the Christian message on the outside, but dilute the radical, sacrificial, and costly message of Jesus. Knowing full well that this would not only be true for his contemporaries, but also for us two millennia later, Jesus warns us in these verses to expect false teachers.

? Re-read these verses carefully. Beyond telling us to expect them, Jesus also gives us clues for recognizing these false prophets. Write down every characteristic --both stated and implied-- by which we can recognize a false teacher.

One metaphor Jesus uses to describe the false prophet is a “wolf in sheep’s clothing.” This is not a wild-eyed blasphemer; it is someone who looks like us. We are cautioned therefore to be watchful and alert, paying close attention to subtle messages that draw us away from the truth of the Gospel.

Consider the following:

The apparent kindness of preachers who water down Jesus’ hard sayings is really arrogance. They are like mail carriers who arrogate to themselves the role of editors of the mail that is entrusted to them to deliver intact. Some preachers act as if Jesus had said, “Blessed are you when all men speak well of you.” But the real Jesus said, “Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets.” (Luke 6:26). If we never offend anyone, we are not giving them Jesus.³

¹ Syncretism: the combination of different forms of belief or practice

² Stott, p. 193

³ Peter Kreeft, *Back to Virtue* (Ignatius Press, 1986) p. 89

? In contemporary evangelicalism, where do you see “wolves in sheep’s clothing”? What messages do you hear that don’t square with Jesus’ hard teachings? Be specific.

The second metaphor Jesus uses for our recognition of false teachers/teaching, is a tree and its fruit. Trees are easy to recognize. Fruit takes time to grow. All fruit begins with a beautiful flower, and as the petals fall away, the fruit develops slowly. Here, Jesus encourages *ongoing* vigilance with respect to the truth of the Gospel. We will need patience and unwavering attention to both the doctrine and the lives of those who teach us.

The text for this week also assumes one critical thing. Our ability to discern and recognize false teachers and false teaching will be dependent on a depth of relationship with Christ. This depth of relationship goes far beyond our feelings about Jesus, but is grounded firmly in a persevering familiarity with God’s Word. When we are “people of the Word,” we will recognize truth from lies. We will also become fruit-bearers ourselves.

READ: John 15:1-11.

Stop here, and allow God’s word to penetrate your heart. Pray that He would show you specific ways that He is asking you to “remain in Him.”

Re-read John 15:6. Now read Isaiah 5:1-6.

The perils of not bearing fruit, or bearing bad fruit, are obvious. To be *cut down and thrown into the fire* are hardly heartwarming words of encouragement, but Jesus calls it as it is. John Piper has reassuring words regarding these verses:

When he says that “a healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit,” he does not mean that no follower of his ever sins. The natural way of thinking about the present tense of a Greek verb like “bear” is “go on bearing.” So Jesus would be saying, “A healthy tree cannot “go on bearing bad fruit.” In other words, a tree is cut down not for bad fruit here and there. It is cut down for producing so much bad fruit that there is no evidence that the tree is good. What God will require at the judgment is not our perfection, but sufficient fruit to show that the tree had life – in our case, divine life.¹

This fork in the road to which Jesus leads us will involve cost in either direction. The “easy” way will ultimately lead to our destruction. The “path of life” has eternal rewards, but will be difficult.

¹ John Piper, *What Jesus Expects of the World* (Crossway, 2006) p. 211

? What are some of the costly decisions you have had to make in order to stay in step with Jesus? Did you experience a sense of reward? If so, how?

? Have you experienced spiritual weariness or fatigue? To what did/do you attribute that weariness? What encouragements do you find in Scripture?

Throughout his teachings, Jesus uses the strong cautions –“Watch out,” “Be alert,” “Be on guard!” Once we enter this hard-to-find narrow gate, we’re not done – we set out on the hard-to-travel narrow road. Nothing is more tempting on a hard journey than to have the offer of an easier route. In our text for this week, we see the ultimate mixed metaphor. Along with the example of the two gates and roads, we are offered a parallel picture of perseverance and recognition --that of the tree and its fruit. Stated again, fruit takes time. It takes time to grow in us as we journey on this narrow path, and it takes time to show itself in those who walk beside us or lead us. We are to be alert and watchful over the long haul.

? Where has God most convicted you through this week’s study? Where has He most encouraged you? Why?

APPLY:

Take some time to thank God for the twists, turns and valleys that have kept you on this narrow road.

Draw a “road map” of your life to this point. You don’t have to be artistic. Simply mark the pivotal points of life, the signposts of God’s presence and direction. Use this (unconventional) exercise as a springboard to prayer. Pray for strength for the journey to come!

DRAW HERE:

FURTHER THOUGHTS:

One of the great temptations to keep us from fulfilling what Jesus calls us to do is that we grow weary in the battle and look back on how easy life was before we started to follow him. Strive to enter through the narrow door means, fight for perseverance. The zeal of many would-be followers of Jesus grows cold, and they drift away. Jesus said, "Because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved" (Matt. 24:12-13). In other words, one of the factors that makes the door to the kingdom of God narrow is that striving to enter must last to the end. ¹

For more, see <http://sbcommunity.org/life/homegroups/>

¹ Piper, p. 179

Study Thirteen

Living the Choice

Matthew 7:21-29

PONDER: Think generally about the relationship between a teacher and apprentice. What ingredients need to be present in order for an apprentice to truly learn and practice well?

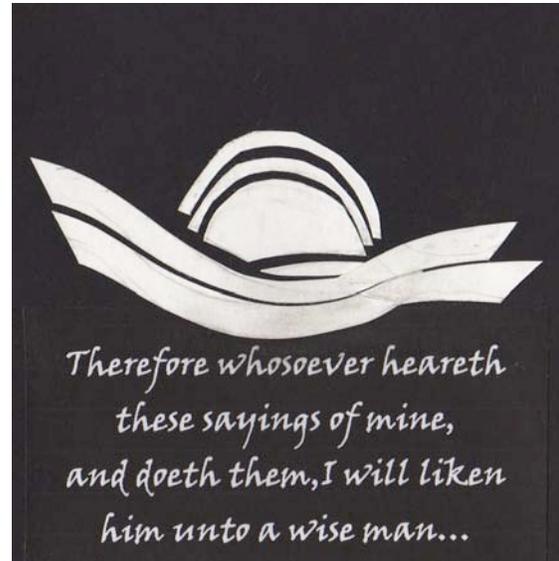
Throughout our study of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus has shown us what it means to be his followers. He has used metaphor and word pictures (*You are the salt/light of the world...*); he has used antitheses (*You have heard it said... But I say to you...*); and he has issued challenges (*Go, therefore, and do...*). Stated another way, we could say that Jesus devotes this three-chapter teaching to saying, “In case you think discipleship means this... I am telling you that it actually means more – It means this...” In our study last week (of the wide and narrow gates, and the tree and its fruit), we were confronted with a choice. Do we follow the world around us –the broad and easy road—or do we take the costly, but life-giving narrow path of Christ?

In this week’s study Jesus illustrates what traveling that narrow path involves. We are called to an ongoing apprenticeship with Jesus. What does this mean? Let’s read, think together, and find out...

READ: Matthew 7:21-29

? How would you articulate, in one sentence, the (central) theme of this week’s text? Write this out, and share with your group.

? The statement in vv. 21-23 falls harshly on our ears. What is your gut response to what Jesus has to say here?



? What, exactly, is Jesus condemning? (Read 1 Cor. 13:1-3)

READ: Luke 18:9-14

? What is the main distinction between the Pharisee and the tax collector in this parable? What point Jesus is trying to make?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus cautions us to be alert and on guard with respect to false teachers and false prophets. In this week's text, he cautions us to be on guard with respect to our own hearts and the motives behind our discipleship. To ensure that we understand and live out this Sermon, Jesus illustrates two unacceptable responses to his teaching.

? What is the error of the Pharisee?

? What is the error of the foolish builder?

? What is the mistake they share in common?

Clearly, we are told throughout the New Testament, that intellectual agreement with the gospel is not enough. We are to live out our faith with our every-day lives, for one reason and one purpose – obedience. Specifically, we obey the teachings of Christ in order to express our love for God to the world around us, and in doing so, further his glory. These final verses of the Sermon on the Mount point out that one of the hazards of the narrow road may be self-deception. Are we living our lives as the Pharisee, saying and doing all the right things, but for our own glory? Or, are we living our lives as the foolish builder – hearing God's word, and then going out and doing things our own way, because it's faster, easier, and meets our needs more quickly?

? How is it with your life? Are you more the Pharisee or the foolish builder? Explain.

? What does the storm represent? What does the storm reveal? Can you think of a revealing “storm” in your own life? Explain.

Re-read v. 23 and v. 27. Both the Pharisee and foolish builder face final condemnation. The Pharisee is not recognized by Jesus at the last day, and is cast away from his presence. The foolish builder’s house is overwhelmed by a storm and destroyed. We ought to read these words with fear and trembling because we too will stand before Jesus at that last day. What will he see? Again, Jesus holds nothing back in this great teaching. The narrow road of following Jesus is not a pleasant additive to our lives; it is an inside-out transformation that takes place on a narrow road that is often difficult.

John Stott writes:

In applying this teaching to ourselves, we need to consider that the Bible is a dangerous book to read, and that the church is a dangerous society to join. For in reading the Bible we hear the words of Christ, and in joining the church we say we believe in Christ. As a result, we belong to the company described by Jesus as both hearing his teaching and calling him Lord. Our membership therefore lays upon us the serious responsibility of ensuring that what we know and what we say is translated into what we do.¹

Before we become overwhelmed by the scope and demand of what Jesus calls us to, let’s go back to the idea of apprenticeship. In medieval culture many professions were preceded by apprenticeships. A master craftsman would take in young people for the purpose of teaching them his/her craft. Often these young apprentices would live in the same house as the master craftsman, and they literally lived out the work with the aspiration of one day becoming proficient craftsmen themselves.

Two ingredients of apprenticeship stand out:

First, one is to *spend time with the Master*, watching and listening as he teaches.

READ:

- John 14:15-21
- Romans 14:17-18

¹ Stott, p. 210

What comfort and assurance these verses offer us! Jesus did not leave us all alone on this narrow road. He sent his Spirit to comfort and to guide us.

? What specific application do you find here for your own life?

Second, one is to *do what the Master teaches and what the Master does*. No one becomes a good carpenter by watching HGTV. One must ultimately pick up a set of plans, hammer and nails, and practice!

READ:

- 1 John 1:6, 2:4-6
- James 1:22-25, 2:14-20

? What specifically encourages or challenges you in these verses?

The Sermon on the Mount closes with these words:

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. (vv. 28, 29)

As this study in the Sermon on the Mount comes to an end, we are reminded that these three chapters in the book of Matthew are much more than a book of ethics and values, or even a manual for Christian discipleship. The Beatitudes introduced us to this upside-down Kingdom of God, where mourners are blessed, the meek inherit the earth, and the poor in spirit are rich. Jesus then expands our view of the Old Testament law by the “transforming initiatives” of practically applying the law to our hearts (not just our behaviors), thereby breaking a cycle of sin that imprisons us. Lastly, and importantly, after many choices along the way, he leads us to the choice: Will we enter the narrow gate, and follow Him along the narrow path? We know it will be difficult because he tells us so. He also tells us that it is the only path to life, and that he will be with us.

In Leviticus 18:3, God repeats a caution to the Israelites that we hear ringing throughout the Old Testament, *You shall not do as they do*. Similarly, it could be argued that the key verse in the Sermon on the Mount is v. 6:8, *Do not be like them*. There is nothing tame or “safe” about Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on

the Mount. He is not shy about assuring us that, if we follow him, we will not blend into our surroundings. In fact, we will be in direct opposition to our culture, but as “salt and light”, emissaries of a God of love.

Stott writes:

Thus the followers of Jesus are to be different – different from both the nominal church and the secular world, different from both the religious and the irreligious. The Sermon on the Mount is the most complete delineation anywhere in the New Testament of the Christian counter-culture. Here is a Christian value-system, ethical standard, religious devotion, attitude to money, ambition, life-style and network of relationships – all of which are totally at variance with those of the non-Christian world. And this Christian counter-culture is the life of the kingdom of God, a fully human life indeed but lived out under the divine rule.¹

Let's go out and live what we believe!

APPLY:

One summation of the Sermon on the Mount could be stated in two questions: Do you believe it? and Will you do it? List the ways you can spend time with the Master. Circle the ones that you have built into your life as disciplines. Underline those things you would like to commit yourself to. Come up with a plan!

Is there one new aspect of imitating Christ you've learned through this season's apprenticeship with Him that you can share with your homegroup? Challenge and encourage one another.

Think about your efforts on behalf of the spiritually and/or materially poor. Where are you (or where are you not) taking your faith “to the street” and living it out in your actions? Again, come up with a plan.

¹ Stott, p. 18

FURTHER THOUGHTS:

Spiritual theology, using Scripture as text, does not present us with a moral code and tell us “Live up to this”; nor does it set out a system of doctrine and say, “Think like this and you will live well.” The biblical way is to tell a story and in the telling invite: “Live into this –This is what it looks like to be human in this God-made and God-ruled world... ..When we submit our lives to what we read in Scripture, we find that we are not being led to see God in our stories but our stories in God’s. God is the larger context and plot in which our stories find themselves.¹

For more, see <http://sbcommunity.org/life/homegroups/>

Sermon Notes. . .

¹ Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book* (Eerdmans, 2006) pp. 43-44