



Chapter 5: The Teaching of Jesus

The Sermon on the Mount

Chapters 5-7 of Matthew's Gospel are often called 'The Sermon on the Mount'. Many people heard about Jesus and came from the regions of Galilee, Judea and Syria and beyond the River Jordan. They had heard that he was a miraculous healer and they came to him wanting to be healed of their diseases.

Jesus went up a mountain to get away from the crowds so that he could talk to his followers. In the Gospels they are called 'disciples' (Matt. 5:1) which means 'learner' or 'pupil'. As he spoke to them Jesus taught them how true disciples should behave in their lives so that they would be accepted by the Lord God.

At the beginning of his sermon, Jesus gave nine blessings (sometimes called 'Beatitudes'). These are blessings that will come to all those disciples who learn from both his words and his example.

Matthew 5:3-12

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| Verse 3 | Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven |
| Verse 4 | Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted |
| Verse 5 | Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. |
| Verse 6 | Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. |
| Verse 7 | Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. |
| Verse 8 | Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. |
| Verse 9 | Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. |
| Verse 10 | Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. |
| Verse 11 | Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. |

Christian Behaviour and its Rewards (5:2-16)

The poor in spirit (verse 3) are those who do not rely on their own abilities but realise they need God's help.

The meek are humble people – they do not think themselves important, they see the events of their lives as overruled by God. God's blessing for the poor in spirit is the "Kingdom of Heaven" but verse 5 says the meek will inherit the earth. However, this does not mean that the meek and the poor in spirit have different rewards.

In verse 10 we read that Jesus taught his disciples to pray for God's kingdom to come on earth. Jesus also calls this kingdom, "the Kingdom of Heaven" because, when Jesus returns, the earth will be ruled by God's will as perfectly as He controls the heavens now. Therefore, the "Kingdom of God" is sometimes called the "Kingdom of Heaven".

None of us, however righteous, will go to heaven – the Lord Jesus will return to this earth to be with his faithful disciples and to fill the earth with God's glory.

Whilst Jesus is God's only begotten Son, baptized believers can enjoy the immense privilege of being called sons of God, but they must seek to live in peace and harmony with others. This will involve showing mercy to others as well as being loyal in their service to God, not trying to please themselves more than Him. They need to be "pure in heart".

In verses 13-16 Jesus says his followers are like the salt of the earth. Salt is used to cleanse, preserve or purify. Paul tells us that our speech should be seasoned with salt (Colossians 4:6). The Word of God in the life of the believer should be like the cleansing action of salt. If disciples lose their enthusiasm to show by their lives that they are Jesus' followers then they are like salt that has lost its cleansing properties. The Word of God has lost its impact in their lives.





Verses 14-16 show us that those who humbly try to serve God to the best of their abilities will be very different from people of the world. They will be as lights in an evil world full of darkness. Their godly behaviour will encourage others.

Jesus and the Law that God gave to Moses (5:17- 48)

From verses 17-19, Jesus shows us that he did not come to destroy the Law given by God to Moses. His life of obedience and work was to fulfil the Law and to show its full meaning. Jesus never broke any of God's Law; he was obedient in every way. The Law God gave Moses pointed forward to the perfect life of Jesus and to his sacrifice on the cross.

In contrast, Jesus criticised the Pharisees because they were proud and were more concerned with the outward details of the Law. Sadly they missed the more important underlying principles like mercy. It is the spirit of God's Law that really matters. For example "*You shall not murder*" (Exodus 20:13) is one of the 10 commandments God gave Moses as part of His Law. Not only should we not commit murder, we should also control our anger that could lead to violence and murder. Also verses 21-24 tell us that God will not accept our worship unless we make peace with the one with whom we are angry. 1 John 3:15 says:

"Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."

Concerning the commandment not to commit adultery, Jesus gives us a warning that just having adulterous thoughts is wrong.

Verses 31-32 provide Jesus' teaching on divorce. There are no grounds for divorce apart from unfaithfulness. In many countries of the world today, divorce is easy and allowed for many reasons. This is quite different from the teaching of Jesus. Followers of Christ should show love and forgiveness, qualities which will help to overcome many of the problems in marriage.

We are told not to swear (use an oath). When we say we will do something we should try our best to do what we have said. Our 'yes' should mean 'yes' and 'no' mean 'no'. We should not swear by a higher authority to emphasise our decisions.

Perhaps one of the most difficult challenges for a Christian is to accept people treating us wrongly, and to show love to those who hate and despise us. In verse 43 Jesus says,

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.'"

However, the Law that God gave Moses said nothing about hating enemies. Sadly people believed that it was acceptable to hate their enemies as long as they loved their neighbours.

Jesus preached that we should love our enemies. When he was treated unjustly he did not fight back with angry words to defend himself. Instead he committed himself to the Lord God whilst praying for forgiveness for those who brutally treated him and crucified him. In this the Lord Jesus was showing true meekness.

If we want to follow the Lord Jesus then we will try to live peaceably with all, even to the extent of loving those who want to hurt or harm us. This is not easy, but it is what we should try to do.

Hell (5:22, 29, 30)

What did Jesus mean when he talked about being thrown into hell?

"If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell." (Matthew 5:29).

This does not mean a place of punishment somewhere under the earth where the souls of bad people burn forever after they die.





The word for 'hell' used here is the word 'Gehenna'. It is another name for a place just outside the city of Jerusalem called 'The Valley of Hinnom'. This is where rubbish was burned in Bible times and sometimes the bodies of executed criminals were thrown there to be destroyed by fire.

Jesus was using picture language to say that if a person does not control his desires he will be completely destroyed, just as things thrown into Gehenna were destroyed by fire. This complete destruction of the wicked will happen when Jesus returns to the earth. They will be rejected by the Lord and will have no place in God's future kingdom on earth. They will die and remain in the grave forever, completely destroyed by everlasting death (see Lesson 23 of the 40 Lesson course).

Aim High! (5:48)

The chapter concludes with *"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"*. Only God is truly perfect. We fail to be perfect because of our human nature. The word translated 'perfect' also means 'wholehearted', so this verse shows that we should aim to be single-minded in the battle to overcome sin in our lives.

The Apostle Paul, when writing to believers in Rome about how they should behave, based this message on the teaching of the Lord Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount.

"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.
Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.
Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.
Never be conceited.
Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.
If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.
Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written,
"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."
To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:14-21)

Chapter 6: Christian Behaviour

How to Pray (6:1-14)

In the time of Jesus many of the Jews practised their religion in a very public way so that others would think they were good people. God does not want hypocrites. The Greek word for 'hypocrite' means 'actor'. An actor in a play pretends to be someone he is not. In the time of Jesus many of the religious leaders put on an outward show of being righteous and doing good to impress others, this was not pleasing to God.

We must remember that God looks on our hearts and knows our thoughts and motives. Jesus told his disciples not to behave like the Jews. The Lord God knows all we do and say – and the thinking behind it! He is able to hear our prayers even when they are said in secret, and will add His blessing.

The disciples asked Jesus; 'How should we pray?' Jesus' answer is given in the prayer in verses 9-13, often called the Lord's Prayer, it is simple and clear.

The followers of Jesus should:

- first recognise God's greatness;
- pray for Jesus to return to set up God's kingdom on the earth. When this happens, God's purpose will be done on earth as it is now done in Heaven.
- then ask God for daily food, seek forgiveness of our sins and protection from temptation and evil.

