



A Red Door Series Guide

Start here

Here's the truth: my life has been changed in preparing this teaching series. I'm not going to tell you how and why. Some of it is too mysterious to explain, some of it too wonderful to describe.

I'm just going to repeat what Philip said to Nathaniel after Jesus changed his life: *"Come and see"*.

My precious Red Door family,
Immerse yourselves in this sublime sermon,
Pray for heart-deep change,
Be faithfully present at worship and small group,
Come and see!

You'll never be the same again.

Jonathan

Scripture quotations have been taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission.

Original cover art by Bex Wise ~ <https://dribbble.com/bexwise>

Blessed

are the poor in spirit,
for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

Blessed

are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed

are the humble,
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed

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

Blessed

are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed

are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

Blessed

are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.

Blessed

are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

Contents and preaching plan

01	Start here		
05	Matt. 5-7 full text	Read this	Now
09	Matt. 5-7 intro	Base camp	6 March
11	Part one: Matthew 5:1-16		
13	Matt. 5:1-12	The good life 1&2	13+20 March
15	Matt. 5:13-16	Salt and light	27 March
17	Part two: Matthew 5:17-48		
19	Matt. 5:17-20	Jesus and the law	1 May
21	Matt. 5:21-26	Anger danger	8 May
23	Matt. 5:27-30	Radical purity	15 May
25	Matt. 5:31-37	Promise keeping	22 May
27	Matt. 5:38-42	Retaliation	29 May
29	Matt. 5:43-48	Enemy love	5 June
31	Matt. 5:48	Like father, like son	12 June
35	Part three: Matthew 6:1-21		
37	Matt. 6:1-4	Giving	10 July
39	Matt. 6:5-15	Praying 1&2	17+24 July
41	Matt. 6:16-21	Fasting	31 July
43	Part four: Matthew 6:22-7:29		
45	Matt. 6:22-34	Worrying	7 August
47	Matt. 7:1-6	Judging	14 August
49	Matt. 7:7-12	Ask your Dad	21 August
51	Matt. 7:13-29	Pick your path	28 August
53	Next steps		

Read this

The sermon in full

When he saw the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to teach them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

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

Blessed are the humble, for they will inherit the earth.

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

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

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

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

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

“You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

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

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

“Don’t think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.

“You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, Do not murder, and whoever murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Whoever insults his brother or sister, will be subject to the court. Whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be subject to hellfire. So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

Reach a settlement quickly with your adversary while you’re on the way with him to the court, or your adversary will hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out of there until you have paid the last penny.

“You have heard that it was said, Do not commit adultery. But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

“It was also said, Whoever divorces his wife must give her a written notice of divorce. But I tell you, everyone who divorces his wife, except in a case of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

“Again, you have heard that it was said to our ancestors, You must not break your oath, but you must keep your oaths to the Lord. But I tell you, don’t take an oath at all: either by heaven, because it is God’s throne; or by the earth, because it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King. Do not swear by your head, because you cannot make a single hair white or black. But let your ‘yes’ mean ‘yes,’ and your ‘no’ mean ‘no.’ Anything more than this is from the evil one.

“You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you, don’t resist an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to the one who asks you, and don’t turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

“You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don’t even the Gentiles do the same?

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

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

“Whenever you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

When you pray, don't babble like the Gentiles, since they imagine they'll be heard for their many words. Don't be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask him.

"Therefore, you should pray like this:

Our Father in heaven, your name be honoured as holy.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not bring us into temptation,

but deliver us from the evil one.

"For if you forgive others their offences, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offences.

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

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

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

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

"Therefore I tell you: Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? Consider the birds of the sky: They don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they? Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying? And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don't labor or spin thread. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was adorned like one of these.

If that's how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won't he do much more for you—you of little faith? So don't worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

"Do not judge, so that you won't be judged. For you will be judged by the same standard with which you judge others, and you will be measured by the same measure you use. Why do you look at the splinter in your brother's eye but don't notice the beam of wood in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the splinter out of your eye,' and look, there's a beam of wood in your own eye? Hypocrite! First take the beam of wood out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother's eye. Don't give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before pigs, or they will trample them under their feet, turn, and tear you to pieces.

"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, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Who among you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him. Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

"Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who go through it. How narrow is the gate and difficult the road that leads to life, and few find it.

"Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves. You'll recognise them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit.

Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So you'll recognise them by their fruit.

"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. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?' Then I will announce to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers!'

"Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn't collapse, because its foundation was on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn't act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house, and it collapsed. It collapsed with a great crash."

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, because he was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes.

Before we ascend the Mountain to hear Jesus preach, we need to get our bearings and find some footholds. To do this, we'll look at the overall purpose and six key concepts.

Purpose

The Sermon is a call to heart-deep, whole-person discipleship. It's a practical ethic for all who have repented of sin, enthroned Jesus as King, and now seek to make all of life all about him.

Jesus is no ordinary preacher, and this is no ordinary sermon. He is the Complete Human Being, the perfect person, the exact image of God. He is the Good Life lived-out.

Jesus is also the King of the kingdom. He knows what the world is like, and what it should be like, and what it *will be like*. In him, the kingdom of heaven has come near, and in him, all people can experience God's grace and favour and love.

To be sure, the Good Life in the kingdom will only be experienced in its fulness when Jesus returns and renews all things. In the meantime, followers of Jesus will stumble and suffer, but under the sovereignty of the King, even this will be a means to experience the flourishing life here and now.

Six key concepts to keep in mind

1 Righteousness is whole-person, heart-deep behaviour that accords with God's nature, will, and kingdom. The righteous person is the one who knows Jesus to be the Complete Human Being - the perfect man - and chooses to follow him and his way of being in the world. Crucially, this person does the will of God, not merely externally, but from the heart.

2 Hypocrisy is what Jesus calls-out as contrary to righteousness. In our culture, a hypocrite is someone who says one thing, but does another. For example, someone who

complains about the amount of rubbish in Lake Caroline, but drops litter out of their car window. Their *words* don't match their *actions*. However, for Jesus, hypocrisy is when *actions* are not motivated by the *heart*. The hypocrite is the one who practises righteousness disconnected from the true inner person.

3 Heart is what Jesus calls the true inner person, following the Old Testament teaching of the Psalms, Proverbs and Isaiah. Therefore, the heart must be connected to outward works for them to be consistent with true righteousness. So, Jesus says, *out of the heart* the mouth speaks. Disciples must forgive one another *from the heart*. You must not lust after a woman *in your heart*. And, (astonishingly) the *pure in heart* will see God.

4 Father in heaven is an incredibly important feature of Jesus' sermon, referred to seventeen times throughout. This metaphor juxtaposes respectful dependance, obedience, and awe, with affectionate familial intimacy. While Jesus' hearers may have been familiar with God being the Father of Israel, it was revelatory for Jesus to refer to 'your father in heaven'.

5 Kingdom of heaven is arguably the most prominent theme in Matthew's gospel. Matthew prefers to use the language of 'kingdom of heaven' rather than 'kingdom of God' (as in the other gospels) simply because he is writing for a Jewish audience, and Jews show reverence for God by not pronouncing his name. Thus, the word 'heaven' is substituted for 'God'.

Jesus himself is the anointed King (Messiah/Christ), and the kingdom of heaven is God's reign over the lives of people who enthrone him as king. It is established here and now as people repent and receive God's rule in their heart.

6 Rewards or 'wages' are described by Jesus as belonging to those living righteous lives in the kingdom. This concept has been underplayed by Protestant churches fearful of preaching a rewards-for-works gospel. But in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus continually offers great reward in heaven and encourages his followers to lay up treasure there.

Part one

Matthew five

One to sixteen

Jesus' vision for wholeness and human flourishing

Every community in all of history has sought to flourish. To this end, gods, prophets, and sages have offered wisdom for the good life. In this sense, Jesus is not unique as he delivers his own charter for human flourishing.

However, unlike all others before or since, Jesus is not merely seeking to deliver a message received from God. He is God. Sitting atop a mountain, interpreting Scripture, and teaching with an authority only God has.

Because he made us, because he knows us, because he loves us, he calls us to a whole-body, heart-deep, righteous way of living. It tastes like salt and shines like light, and even when it hurts, it's blessed and flourishing and downright good.

The good life

Matt. 5:1-12

These Beatitudes are both a description of, and invitation to, the good life. Jesus is offering his hearers a way of being in the world that will result in their flourishing now and in the age to come.

Verse by verse

1-2 The similarity between Jesus here and Moses on Mount Sinai is symbolically important, and would have been obvious to Matthew's (Jewish) audience. Jesus is the greater Moses because he doesn't just receive instruction *from God*, but gives it *himself*.

3 This the beginning point for any disciple of Jesus, because the poor in spirit are those who recognise they are in need of God's grace and have no way to help themselves. The kingdom of heaven belongs to these (and none other!). All of the following Beatitudes are in some sense informed/enabled by this one.

Example: The Pharisee and the Tax Collector, Luke 18.9-14

4 Related to the first statement is this about those who mourn. Mourning here refers to the grief a disciple experiences when he or she is convicted of sin. This 'mourning' is met by 'comfort' from God when the disciple repents of sin and turns away from it.

Example: The Lost Son, Luke 15.17-20

5 The humble (or meek) are those who don't impose themselves on others, or exploit their advantages over others. In living this way, they are following Jesus own example of humility. Disciples who live this way may have to forgo the trappings and treasures of a 'successful' life, but (paradoxically) they will inherit the earth when God settles accounts on the Last Day.

Example: Jesus humbled and exalted, Philippians 2.3-11

6 Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed because righteousness is *whole-person, heart-deep behaviour that accords with God's nature, will, and kingdom*.

Human beings have always replaced these appetites by yearning after lesser things: power, fame, fortune, etc. The Christian ideal is starkly different, but ultimately far more satisfying.

7 The merciful being rewarded with mercy from God is a theme throughout Jesus' teaching, especially in Matthew. It features in Jesus' model prayer (6.12-14), and is made particularly stark in the parable of The Unforgiving Servant (Matt 18.21-35).

The bottom line is that a transformed heart - the true inner person - must result in a transformed life that offers the same mercy and forgiveness as has been received from God. Someone who does not show mercy to others shows that his own heart has not received God's mercy.

8 The pure in heart are those whose pursuit of purity and righteousness affects every area of life. They are not content with outward appearances of godliness, but seek inward transformation. No one is able to attain this outright purity, but God himself is on hand to purify and restore those who are willing (see James 4:8).

9 The peacemakers are not just passive people who prefer serenity to conflict, rather they busy themselves with helping establish God's kingdom of peace on the earth. True *shalom* peace is not merely the absence of conflict, but God's restorative work of justice. Thus, the peacemakers will be called sons of God as they imitate their Father's work.

10-12 The persecuted are those who have been wrongly treated because of their faith. They are blessed because God is pleased when his people show that they value him above everything else - remaining faithful amid opposition for righteousness' sake.

Discussion starters

Q1 If Beatitudes describe and invite us to the good life as Jesus sees it, what are the Beatitudes of our culture?

Q2 Jesus preached his Beatitudes and Matthew wrote them down. How are the Beatitudes of our culture communicated?

Q3 Since our culture's Beatitudes are way more pervasive than Jesus', how can we ensure that we are regularly hearing Jesus' voice in the day-to-day?

Q4 Which Beatitude challenged or encouraged you most?

Salt and light

Matt. 5:13-16

Jesus is calling his disciples to live in his kingdom on earth. When people follow Jesus and live like him, the world around them is impacted for the better, and the glory of God is manifested among the nations. That's what it means to be salt and light.

Verse by verse

13 Scholars have long tried to discern the meaning of Jesus' salt metaphor, and theories abound. Here's the bottom-line: *salt makes things better*. It enhances flavour, preserves against rot, was incredibly valuable, and was used throughout Israel's history in covenant ceremonies to symbolise God's never-ending faithfulness. Jesus wants his followers to be good like salt.

14 Similarly, light is useful, valuable, and good. In a culture without electricity, the value of light is obvious. Light also rescues, comforts, and exposes darkness.

For Israel, light was associated with the coming of the Messiah, as Charles Quarles writes:

“ Throughout the prophecies of Isaiah, the shining light is a metaphor of the Messiah and His people fulfilling the missionary purpose of manifesting the glory of God among the nations.

15-16 Apart from being generally useful, valuable, and good for the world, both salt and light are utterly useless if they don't fulfil their purpose. Salt that isn't salty, light that's hidden - these things are no good to anybody.

Jesus warns against the kind of Christianity that is ultimately no good for the world. Instead, the church must realise that it is what Jesus says it is: salt and light.

Discussion starters

Q1 In the Greco-Roman culture of first century, Christians were seen as being very weird, but good to have around because they were so committed to caring for, and blessing those around them. They had a very strange worldview, but they were the kind of people you wanted living next door!
How are Christians generally viewed today?

Q2 If Christians aren't as good for society as they once were, it is probably because there is far more *Christian nominalism* today. That is, people who identify as Christian, but don't follow the teachings of Jesus.
Read and reflect on this piece by Wilbur Reese. How does it make you feel?

I would like to buy three dollars worth of God, please.

Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough of Him to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don't want enough of Him to make me love a black man or pick beets with a migrant. I want ecstasy, not transformation. I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack, please.

I would like to buy three dollars worth of God, please.

Q3 How do you reconcile the below two teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount?

5:16 *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

6:1-2 *Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward with your Father in heaven. So whenever you give to the poor, don't sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be applauded by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward.*

Part two

Matthew five

Seventeen to forty eight

The heart of the matter is a matter of the heart

For Jesus, this whole preaching thing began back in Matthew 4:17 ~ *From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near."*

In this section of teaching from 5:17-48, we'll see that repentance is about the whole person (head, heart, hands) turning back to God and making all of life all about Jesus.

This call to holiness and wholeness begins with an affirmation of the complete relevance of the Old Testament, and continues with practical teaching on whole-body, heart-deep righteous living.

Jesus and the law

Matt. 5:17-20

God never contradicts himself. The same Lord who inspired the Old Testament is preaching this Sermon on the Mount. In this passage Jesus lays the foundation for the next section of teaching (v21-48) in which he will rightly interpret and apply the Hebrew scriptures.

Verse by verse

17-18 Having begun his sermon with such radical teaching, perhaps Jesus was sensitive to some in the crowd who were wondering if he was casting aside the Law and the Prophets (Old Testament). His response is emphatic: not only is he not minimising the Law, but anyone who does will be 'minimised' in the kingdom of heaven (v.19).

Furthermore, Jesus not only preserves the OT, but fulfils it. As one commentator puts it:

“ Jesus “fulfils” all of the OT in that it all points to him, not only in its specific predictions of a Messiah but also in its sacrificial system, which looked forward to his great sacrifice of himself, in many events in the history of Israel which foreshadowed his life as God’s true Son, in the laws which only he perfectly obeyed, and in the Wisdom Literature, which sets forth a behavioural pattern that his life exemplified.

19-20 The idea that entry to the kingdom of heaven required a righteousness surpassing that of the scribes and Pharisees was, frankly, outrageous. No one was more zealous for the law than those religious leaders, and thus, it sounds like Jesus is excluding just about everyone from entry to the kingdom.

However, once we realise what constitutes true righteousness according to Jesus (see p.07), we can grasp his point: the reason his followers will exceed the religious elite is because those leaders practice righteousness for its own sake, disconnected from heart-level obedience to God.

Discussion starters

Q1 If you were writing an Amazon review for the Old Testament, what would you say?

Q2 Over the centuries, Christians have often wanted to minimise the importance of the Old Testament.

- Why do you think this is?
- Do you ever feel this way yourself?
- What would we lose if we did away with the OT?

Q3 Jesus seems certain that those who enter the kingdom of heaven (his followers) will live righteous lives. Remembering that Jesus is not referring to the righteousness we receive by faith in salvation, but rather behaviour that accords with God’s nature, will, and coming kingdom:

- How would you respond if someone asked if you are a righteous person?
- How do we cultivate (true) righteousness in our lives?
- What passages in scripture speak of God’s work in enabling/empowering us to live righteously?

Anger danger

Matt. 5:21-26

The worst of external sins have their root in one's heart. Murder begins with anger, adultery begins with lust. Jesus consistently calls his followers to righteousness that flows from the heart - the true inner person - rather than mere outward obedience.

Ultimately, the sin that binds both anger and murder is the sin of vandalism - that is - the defacing/destruction of God's handiwork: people made in his image.

This passage begins the larger section of teaching from v21-48 in which Jesus takes six teachings of the Torah and interprets and applies them for his followers.

There is a fairly clear and consistent three-point pattern to Jesus' teaching in 5:21-48

- 1** A statement from the Torah
- 2** An explanation of the true intent of the Law
- 3** The practical application

Verse by verse

21 One of the Big 10 from Exodus 20:13. The command prohibiting murder was fundamental to Hebrew ethics.

22 That escalated quickly! Jesus' intention is to jolt his hearers rather than to offer a precise categorisation of escalating judgments depending on the wording of the insult.

Contrary to how some have read it, Jesus is not attempting to take an OT law and raise the bar of expectation drastically, rather he is affirming what the Law always affirmed - that righteousness (right living) is a matter of the heart, not just a question of whether we have committed this or that act (see Hosea 6:6; Joel 2:13; Mat. 5:20).

23-26 This prizing of true righteousness over external formality is affirmed by the rest of the passage. Where there is unreconciled relationship, God desires reconciliation before worship. This is an astonishing statement about the seriousness of what Jesus is saying.

Discussion starters

Q1 What makes you angry?

Q2 Read the words of Jesus' younger brother in James 3:1-12. What jumps out at you when you read that passage?

Q3 Sometimes we hear people say that the Old Testament is about law-keeping, and the New Testament is about grace-giving. What do you make of that idea?

Q4 Jesus instructs us to reconcile relationships before we engage in gathered worship. Would you consider doing this for real?

Q5 The doctrine that humans have ultimate worth because they are made in the image of God is one of the most powerful ideas in history. It is the basis for a universal bill of human rights, and probably something you take for granted (if you're from a Western culture).

- What does it mean to you to be made in the image of God?

- What difference would it make if our culture stopped believing this?*

*You might like to debate whether there is any objective basis for believing all people are of inherent and equal worth without this foundational concept.

Radical purity

Matt. 5:27-30

Jesus continues to interpret the Torah while demonstrating how the heart-deep righteousness of his followers will exceed that of the religious elite. Moving from anger and murder to lust and adultery, he establishes an ethic of radical purity that refuses to objectify God's image bearers, and cuts off all pathways to sin.

Verse by verse

27 A direct quote from Exodus 20:14 which reflects God's original intention for sex to be exclusively enjoyed in the context of marriage between one man and one woman.

28 This is another statement designed to jolt us! First, two things Jesus is *not saying*:

- He is not forbidding the appreciation of beauty. Indeed, God delights in creating beautiful things, and we were made to appreciate them. By 'looking lustfully' Jesus means the lingering gaze and the objectification of his creation that follows when appreciation turns to lust.

- As with anger/murder, Jesus is not saying lust is the same thing as adultery, or even that it is as bad. Clearly adultery and murder and more damaging than anger and lust.

His point is that these are issues of the heart, and that righteous does not consist simply of saying: "I never murdered, I never cheated."

29-30 Jesus again uses hyperbole to jolt us out of complacency. Anything that causes us to sin, any pathway that leads us away from kingdom fealty, is to be cut off. We are to be ruthless with temptations.

Temptations to sin, perhaps particularly temptations to lust, are a guaranteed feature of life in this age. But giving in to temptation is not inevitable (see 1 Cor. 10:13).

As the great Martin Luther put it:

" You cannot keep birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.

Discussion starters

Q1 Among your friends and peers, is there a general attitude to a) lust; and b) adultery? How does it differ from your own?

Q2 Appreciating beauty glorifies God, but lusting after people made in his image is the pathway to condemnation (cf. v.29-30). How can the follower of Jesus cultivate godliness in this?

Q3 Think about the pathways that exist in your own life that lead you to sin and destructive behaviour. Try listing them below and pray for wisdom to a) have the courage to 'cut them off and throw them away'; and b) put in place systems/strategies to ensure they remain cut off from you.

Sharing these with a trusted brother/sister/small group is a wonderful next step.

Promise keeping

Matt. 5:31-37

This passage brings together Jesus' teaching on divorce (which is further fleshed-out in Matt. 19:1-12) and his teaching on honesty and oath-taking. Ultimately, disciples are called to keep both their marriage vows and their promises because God himself is eternally faithful.

Verse by verse

31-32 Deuteronomy 24:1 made provision for divorce, but in Jesus' day there was disagreement among rabbinical schools as to what constituted lawful grounds for divorce. Jesus is approached in Matt. 19 and asked for his view on this debate. His response was more conservative than any of the rabbis of the day: *divorce is only permitted in the case of sexual immorality* (most likely, adultery).

In order to make his case (in Matt. 19) he appeals not to the Torah, but to God's intention at Creation. The biblical ideal is marriage as a lifelong union between a man and a woman, both of whom are Spirit-filled disciples of Jesus.

33-37 The prohibition against oath-taking is not to be applied in every area of life. It was oath-taking in casual conversation that Jesus was speaking to here.

It appears that people - including the religious leaders (cf. Matt. 23:16-17) - were using oaths as a way of *not* keeping their promises.

It worked like this:

- The Torah instructed Israel that if they took an oath using God's name, they would be bound to keep it or suffer judgement.
- This was applied to taking oaths by 'holy' objects as well.
- People abused the law by swearing oaths by other things so that when they broke their oath, they wouldn't be judged by God.
- Jesus says all of this is nonsense. God reigns over everything people swear by. Best if we all stopped swearing, and just did what we said in the first place. Yes be yes, no be no.

Discussion starters

Q1 You catch up with a friend who has found the courage to tell you about the way her husband treats her. He puts her down constantly, has frequently made remarks about the 'hot women' at work, and occasionally loses his temper - scaring the kids in the process. "I just can't do it anymore," she says.

- What do you say in response?

Q2 Another friend studied Jesus' teaching on divorce and is now wracked with guilt. He thinks he probably didn't have biblical grounds when he divorced his wife a few years back. She is now remarried and he's asking you for help.

- How do you counsel him?

Q3 Not many of us live-out the call to let our yes mean yes, and our no mean no. Why do you think this is? What steps can we take to more closely follow Jesus in this?

Retaliation

Matt. 5:38-42

Life in the kingdom here and now is ultimately an exercise in trust. We follow Jesus and obey him, even when his teaching makes life more difficult. This passage calls for a fundamental change in how Jesus' disciples retaliate when they're insulted.

Verse by verse

38 The law of retaliation or *lex talionis* is ancient, present in Babylonian culture 2000 BC. This law was affirmed by God in several places in the OT (cf. Deut. 19:16-21). It sounds brutal to modern ears, but the law was actually given to guard against the escalation of violence that happens when one party is injured or offended and takes matters into their own hands.

This law was concerned with *restitution* not retribution.

39 "Don't resist an evildoer." Jesus continually employs hyperbole in his sermon to make his argument. For example, the call to cut off an arm and gouge out an eye (5:29-30). This doesn't negate the argument he is making, but it does require us to find nuance by consulting the whole counsel of scripture.

To strike someone on the *right* cheek required (a right-handed offender) to deliver a back-handed slap. This was the ultimate insult, communicating the fact that you had no honour, no social standing. It was the slap you gave a slave or a heretic. In context, this almost certainly refers to Jesus' followers being maligned for following him (cf. 5:10-12).

40-42 A cloak was an essential possession in first century Palestine. It was your clothing by day, and your bed by night. The Torah prevented anyone being sued for their cloak on a permanent basis. Jesus says, Give it to them!

Roman soldiers could force any Hebrew man to carry their belongings for one mile (1000 steps) but no further. Jesus says, Double it!

The application of this teaching needs to be done with wisdom, taking into account the whole counsel of God.*

Discussion starters

Q1 What happens in your heart when you are publicly shamed or insulted? What happens next?

Q2 Your friend is living in an abusive relationship and believes she is obeying Jesus' teaching in this passage by not seeking safety.

- How would you counsel her?

- What passages of Scripture would you go to?

Q3 The refusal to retaliate is ultimately rooted in trust: God will ultimately settle accounts, so we don't have to. Read these verses aloud and reflect on the implications:

Romans 12:19 *Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God's wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord.*

1 Peter 2:21-23 *For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He did not commit sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth; when he was insulted, he did not insult in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten but entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.*

*Jonathan Pennington writes:

As with all ethical teaching, the practical outworking of these principles - even these specific illustrations of cheek turning, coat giving, and mile walking - requires localised wisdom... these illustrations are just that; they are not to be applied literally and without wise exceptions... [Jesus' teaching] gives a vision of virtue, of how to be in the world, that accords with God's righteousness; but the working out of this in the individual's life is inevitably localised. This is wisdom.

Enemy love

Matt. 5:43-48

One of the most shocking statements made by anyone in history, and the basis for truly Christian ethics ever since, Jesus' call to 'enemy love' goes right to the heart of his vision for flourishing kingdom living.

Verse by verse

43 "Love your neighbour" is a direct quote from Lev. 19:18, however, "hate your enemy" is nowhere to be found in the OT. This probably reflects the fact that Jesus is addressing the misapplication of the Torah by the religious leaders of the day. Evidently they had taken the positive command and added (perhaps even emphasised) its opposite.

44-47 Jesus' implication that these religious leaders are actually living like tax collectors and Gentiles (v.46-47) would have been particularly offensive to them!

The call to love one's enemies is rooted in the fact that followers of Jesus are children of God (v.45). God himself loves his enemies, and blesses even those who curse him, so to be part of the Family means doing likewise.

This is not the first time Jesus has grounded righteous behaviour in the fact of our kinship with God. Remember the seventh Beatitude:

*" Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.*

48 This verse provides the climax and summary of the whole unit of teaching in 5:17-48. Over the page, we will analyse v48 and summarise our study thus far.

Discussion starters

Q1 The worst of church history (as with human history) can be seen as a failure to obey Jesus' teaching to love our enemies.

- With such a terrible track record to date, how can we hope to live by this teaching in the future?

Q2 Social media platforms seem to be places where a lack of love for 'enemies' is particularly prevalent.

- How can Christians on social media remain faithful to Jesus' vision in this passage?

Q3 Read these passages aloud and discuss their specific application to your group:

Matthew 5:44 *But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...*

Ephesians 5:1-2 *Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God.*

1 John 4:7-11 *Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another.*

1 Peter 1:14-16 *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy.*

Like father, like son

Matt. 5:48

Mid-series recap

Matthew 5:48 is the climax and summary of the whole unit of Jesus' teaching from 5:17-48, so it's a great opportunity to recap what we've learnt so far.

Chapter 5-7 Base camp

The Sermon is a call to heart-deep, whole-person discipleship. It's a practical ethic for all who have repented of sin, enthroned Jesus as King, and now seek to make all of life all about him.

Jesus is no ordinary preacher, and this is no ordinary sermon. He is the Complete Human Being, the perfect person, the exact image of God. He is the Good Life lived-out.

Jesus is also the King of the kingdom. He knows what the world is like, and what it should be like, and what it will be like. In him, the kingdom of heaven has come near, and in him, all people can experience God's grace and favour and love.

To be sure, the Good Life in the kingdom will only be experienced in its fulness when Jesus returns and renews all things. In the meantime, followers of Jesus will stumble and suffer, but under the sovereignty of the King, even this will be a means to experience the flourishing life here and now.

5:1-12 The good life

The similarity between Jesus here and Moses on Mount Sinai is symbolically important, and would have been obvious to Matthew's (Jewish) audience. Jesus is the greater Moses because he doesn't just receive instruction *from God*, but gives it *himself*.

The Beatitudes that follow are both a description of, and invitation to, the good life. Jesus is offering his hearers a way of being in the world that will result in their flourishing now and in the age to come.

5:13-16 Salt and light

Jesus is calling his disciples to live in his kingdom on earth. When people follow Jesus and live like him, the world around them is impacted for the better, and the glory of God is manifested among the nations. That's what it means to be salt and light.

5:17-20 Jesus and the law

God never contradicts himself. The same Lord who inspired the Old Testament is preaching this Sermon on the Mount. In this passage Jesus lays the foundation for the next section of teaching (v21-48) in which he will rightly interpret and apply the Hebrew scriptures.

5:21-26 Anger danger

The worst of external sins have their root in one's heart. Murder begins with anger, adultery begins with lust. Jesus consistently calls his followers to righteousness that flows from the heart - the true inner person - rather than mere outward obedience.

The sin that binds both anger and murder is the sin of vandalism - that is - the destruction of people made in God's image.

5:27-30 Radical purity

Jesus continues to interpret the Torah while demonstrating how the heart-deep righteousness of his followers will exceed that of the religious elite. Moving from anger and murder to lust and adultery, he establishes an ethic of radical purity that refuses to objectify God's image bearers, and cuts off all pathways to sin.

5:31-37 Promise keeping

This passage brings together Jesus' teaching on divorce (which is further fleshed-out in Matt. 19:1-12) and his teaching on honesty and oath-taking. Ultimately, disciples are called to keep both their marriage vows and their promises because God himself is eternally faithful.

5:38-42 Retaliation

Life in the kingdom here and now is ultimately an exercise in trust. We follow Jesus and obey him, even when his teaching makes life more difficult. This passage calls for a fundamental change in how Jesus' disciples retaliate when they're insulted.

Mid-series recap

5:43-48 *Enemy love*

One of the most shocking statements made by anyone in history, and the basis for truly Christian ethics ever since, Jesus' call to 'enemy love' goes right to the heart of his vision for flourishing kingdom living.

5:48 *Like father, like son*

One of the major themes of Jesus' teaching thus far concerns the imitation of God by his children. In one sense, all of the preceding six passages contain exhortations to be like God: God does not murder, but forgives; God is faithful to his marriage covenant with Israel; God keeps his promises; God forgives even those who dishonour him; and God loves his enemies.

Therefore, 5:48 is the 'perfect' summary remark for this whole section because it speaks of Jesus' desire for his followers to be "whole" like their heavenly Father.

Most versions of the Bible translate the Greek word *teleios* to the English word *perfect*, but I don't think that fits well with the purpose and key themes of the sermon. Jesus is not seeking moral perfection from his disciples, but rather a full-bodied, wholehearted, all-of-life orientation toward God. They must be *whole* as their Father is *whole*, rather than being like the Pharisees and scribes who were one thing on the outside and something else on the inside.

This is the flourishing wholeness (in the midst of suffering) that the Beatitudes describe. This is the righteousness that Jesus desires, and without which, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven. This is the whole-person, heart-deep behaviour that accords with God's nature, will, and and kingdom.

Therefore, you shall be whole as your heavenly Father is whole.

Discussion starters

Q1 Does Jesus really think his disciples will go on to live-out his vision for human flourishing?

Q2 Would you take a new Christian or a seeker to the Sermon on the Mount as a description of Christian living? Why/why not?

Q3 Which teaching of Jesus has challenged you most in the series so far?

Q4 Remembering Jesus command to 'be whole' like our Father is whole:

- Are there areas of your life where you can identify a particular lack of 'wholeness' (peace, shalom, blessing etc.)?

- How can Jesus (and his church) help address this lack of flourishing?

Q5 for extra points! Are you able to articulate the difference between the righteousness Jesus is describing and the righteousness Paul talks about in his letters?

- The righteousness that Jesus speaks of: whole-person, heart-deep behaviour that accords with God's nature, will, and and kingdom.

- Among Paul's references to (imputed) righteousness, 2 Corinthians 5:21 is the clearest: *He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Part three

Matthew six

One to twenty one

Practising righteousness without being a (massive) hypocrite

Jesus simply expects his followers to engage in regular acts of piety as part of their discipleship. Practices like almsgiving (giving to help the needy), praying, and fasting.

Unfortunately, these acts which are wonderful things in themselves, are liable to be leveraged to accumulate social capital. You know how it is: the opportunity to be known in the church as a Powerful Prayer Warrior™ can motivate the public intercessor more than they would like to admit.

Frankly, Jesus calls this out as hypocrisy.

Remember, according to Jesus, hypocrisy is when righteous actions are not motivated by the heart. The piety is not the problem. It's piety practised externally without being rooted in the inner person that constitutes empty religion.

Giving

Matt. 6:1-4

The first example Jesus gives of practicing righteous piety is that of giving - specifically giving to the poor - traditionally known as *almsgiving*. The question of whether or not disciples should give to the needy is not raised because it is simply assumed they will. The issue at hand is (once again!) that of the heart: are your righteous deeds rooted in the inner-person?

Verse by verse

1 In our culture, it's generally held that to the degree you get something out of doing good, it diminishes the virtue of the deed (altruism). Not so for Jesus! The issue is not whether you are doing good to get a reward - of course you are! The question is what kind of reward you're looking for: reward with the Father, or plaudits from people.

2 Most of the teaching on giving in the modern church concerns giving to fund church ministry. There are bills to be paid, staff to remunerate, ministries to fund. But for much of church history, 'giving' meant 'almsgiving' - financially supporting those in need. With no government support, the needs of the poor were met by the community.

Jesus says, as you do the righteous thing and give to the needy, you can have rewards with the Father, or applause from the people, but not both!

3-4 The point of application is not to do away with public giving (like passing the plate at church), but an emphatic point about righteous almsgiving being driven by internal realities. The motivation for giving is inward and 'secret' but because God is Father, he knows us and sees us and rewards us accordingly.*

* Interestingly, this dynamic is picked applied in a different context by Paul in Romans 2:28-29

For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, and true circumcision is not something visible in the flesh. On the contrary, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart—by the Spirit, not the letter. That person's praise is not from people but from God.

Discussion starters

Q1 "To the degree that we are rewarded for doing good, it diminishes the intrinsic goodness or virtue of the deed."

- What do you make of this statement? How does it square with Jesus' teaching about practicing righteousness?

Q2 Does the presence of government safety nets for people in financial need negate the necessity for almsgiving by Christians?

Q3 Discuss the danger of assessing our level of giving (to the needy) against the prevailing culture around us - rather than the teaching of Jesus. What can we do to guard against this?

Q4 What can this group do to provide for the needy in our own context?

Praying

Matt. 6:5-15

After almsgiving, Jesus addresses the practice of prayer and in so doing, provides a model prayer that is at the very heart of the Sermon on the Mount itself.

Verse by verse - Week one

5-6 The warning and application here mirrors that of the teaching on almsgiving (cf. 6:1-4).

7-8 The reason Jesus' disciples don't need to 'babble' (like Gentiles who were trying to manipulate the gods) is found in the truth that is foundation for much of what Jesus will teach in this chapter: *God is your Father. He knows what you need.*

9-10 This section makes God's nature, will and coming kingdom the focus. These things are of the highest importance to citizens of the kingdom.

Verse by verse - Week two

11-13 Next comes a petition for God's provision: both for the basic needs of daily life (bread), and the deeper need for forgiveness and reconciliation. Again, this is all based in the foundational truth that God is a father who knows and loves us. This will be fleshed-out further in 7:7-12.

14-15 The model prayer is followed by an abrupt and severe warning against withholding forgiveness.

Michael Green explains:

" It is not as though God petulantly says, 'I won't forgive you unless you forgive those who have wronged you.' The fact is, he cannot forgive us in those circumstances. For if we are to open our hands to receive his gracious pardon, we cannot keep our fists tightly clenched against those who have wronged us... [God] cannot and he will not pardon the impenitent, including those who nurse grievances against others.

Discussion starters - Week one

Q1 You're down to lead the intercessions at church this week. How do you guard against the hypocrisy of v.5?

Q2 *God is a perfect Father, he knows what you need.*

- In what sense does this foundational truth shape your prayer life?

- How could your daily prayers be informed/reformed by absorbing this truth at the heart-level?

Q3 Spend time praying for God's name to be honoured, his kingdom to come, and his will to be done in whatever circumstanced you find yourself in right now.

Discussion starters - Week two

Q1 Read Jesus' powerful parable in Matthew 18:21-35.

- What emotions does the story stir-up in you?

- In what circumstances, if any, could a Christian withhold forgiveness from someone?

Q2 Spend some time praying through the Lord's Prayer*, using it as a framework to fill-out with your own praise, worries, needs.

*I like Tom Wright's translation the NTE version:

So this is how you should pray:

*Our father in heaven,
may your name be honoured
may your kingdom come
may your will be done
as in heaven, so on earth.
Give us today the bread we need now;
and forgive us the things we owe,
as we too have forgiven what was owed to us.
Don't bring us into the great trial,
but rescue us from evil.*

Fasting

Matt. 6:16-21

This is the third and final example of true piety that meets the standards of Jesus' call to greater, heart-level righteousness (cf. 5:20). The same pattern of teaching applied to almsgiving and prayer is now applied to fasting.

Verse by verse

16 Regular fasting was, along with almsgiving and prayer, a pillar of Jewish piety. As with his teaching on each of these practices, Jesus doesn't address *whether* one should fast (of course they should!) but rather *how*.

Again, the warning is against hypocrisy: righteous acts disconnected from the heart. In this case, the hypocrite 'disfigures' his face to make it obvious he is suffering (likely for the sake of the community - as in fasting for rain in a dry season). Their reward is not with the Father in heaven, but in the praise of a grateful community.

17-18 Again, Jesus application for those wanting to avoid such hypocrisy is to remove the hazard altogether: don't let people see your fasting. That is, remove the obvious signs.

Putting oil on your head was generally forbidden during times of corporate/ritual fasting, and washing your face would remove the ashes that people sometimes smeared on their face (either as a symbol of repentance, or a way of getting people to see they were fasting!).

19-21 Throughout this section, Jesus has been warning us against the desire for temporal adulation from people (earthly reward). To this he adds the temporal treasure of possessions and money. The point is clear: Jesus' followers, as citizens of the Kingdom, are to seek unfading eternal rewards with their Father in heaven. You can have one, but not both. You can serve one, but not both.

Discussion starters

Q1 "Let us say something about fasting, because many, for want of knowing its usefulness, undervalue its necessity, and some reject it as almost superfluous..." ~ John Calvin

- This describes much of modern, Western Christianity. Why do you think fasting is so uncommon in churches like ours?

Q2 A lot of modern research points to the physical health benefits of fasting. Is it okay to fast for health reasons that are disconnected from the disciplines of prayer and meditation?

Q3 The 19th century preacher, Charles Spurgeon, wrote:
"Our seasons of fasting and prayer at the Metropolitan Tabernacle have been high days indeed; never has Heaven's gate stood wider; never have our hearts been nearer the central Glory."

- Should we be fasting regularly at Red Door?

- How might fasting be an aid to worship?

Q4 Everyone is in danger of serving money/possessions rather than God. What are some practical strategies for guarding us against this?

Part four

Matthew six twenty two

To seven twenty nine

Living out the kingdom while living in the world

With all of this talk about kingdom living, it's important to remember an essential fact of life: the kingdom is *now*, and it's *not yet*.

Jesus' vision for wholeness and flourishing is for this life, but it won't be fully realised until he brings it to consummation.

As we eagerly wait for that great Day, we need to figure out how to live in the tension. What do we do with the part of our heart that desires riches now, rather than in the age to come? How do we deal with worry and anxiety and the drive to survive? How do we fight against our natural tendency to judge and criticise and tear-down others?

Jesus has much to say. Come and see...

Worrying

Matt. 6:22-34

Anxiety is a universal human experience. If the research is right, anxiety is only growing in prevalence as we ostensibly get more comfortable and well provisioned. This is the irony that Jesus was shining a light on in the Sermon on the Mount: when people seek to accumulate for themselves, apart from God, the result is anxiety. Greed causes worry, and Jesus wants to spare his followers that by calling them to single-minded devotion to God's Kingdom.

Verse by verse

22-24 Throughout the Sermon, Jesus has been contrasting the wholeness/single-mindedness of the truly righteous, with the hypocrisy/double-mindedness of the unrighteous. This passage follows that pattern, with v22-23 being illustration, and v24 application.

The healthy (or whole) eye is generous, but the bad (or evil) eye is stingy. This illustration would make much more sense to his original hearers, and employs a clever play on words in the original Greek, but the overall message is clear, and made very stark in v24 - the way of wholeness is the way of generosity, and the way of both is the way of the Kingdom.

25-32 Jesus paints a picture of discipleship that looks more like flowers and birds than stockbrokers and hustlers. This is not to say that life will be easy for his followers (as he's already made plain) but that those who entrust themselves *wholly* to God will be provided for according to God's wisdom.

33-34 It may look like foolishness to others to pursue a Now and Not Yet Kingdom over money in the bank, but those who want to experience temporal peace and eternal reward will act on Jesus' invitation.

Discussion starters

Q1 In our culture we enjoy the best standard of living that humans have experienced in the history of the world.

- Why are we so anxious? *

Q2 Greed seems to be affirmed by just about every marketing message we consume from day to day. It's incredibly difficult to live in our culture and be impervious to this.

- What are some practical antidotes for greed?

Q3 Who would you be disappointing most if you decided to pursue - whole-heartedly, single-mindedly - the Kingdom of God, rather than the Kingdom of Stuff?

Q4 What can your group do today to reaffirm the Lordship of Jesus over the lordship of money?

** We must remember that there are many causes of anxiety, some of which people have little control over. These include [childhood] trauma, personality disorders, etc. In contrast to these, Jesus is speaking to the kind of anxiety that is propagated by a desire for wealth, possessions, and establishing one's own kingdom.*

Judging

Matt. 7:1-6

In our culture, *judging* someone has nothing but negative connotations. "Don't judge me" is a catchphrase for modern interactions. But Jesus doesn't use the phrase this way. In this passage, Jesus is giving his followers a prescription for wise and godly judgment.

Verse by verse

1-2 As they seek to live wisely in the world (shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves - Matt. 10:16), Jesus reminds his followers that here can be righteous judging, and unrighteous - just and unjust. The point of application here is to judge fairly, which is a thread in the great summary teaching of 7:12 -

" Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

3-5 A useful way to inhibit our natural inclination to judge others more harshly than we judge ourselves is to first come to terms with our own faults and shortcomings. It's hard to look down on someone for having a splinter in their eye, when you know full-well you have a log in yours!

6 This final piece of the teaching seems to be out of place - and potentially quite offensive! Jesus appears to be balancing his teaching in v1-5 with a warning against naivety. *There is a difference between pearls and pigs*, and his followers need to know it.

Some see the dogs and pigs of v7 as referring to gentile unbelievers, but I think it more likely refers to Jews who refused (sometimes violently) to receive the Gospel (cf. Matt 10:14).

Discussion starters

Q1 What is the relationship between judgment and wisdom? Can you have one without the other?

Q2 Being aware we have a log in our eye seems like an easy task, yet most of us aren't very well acquainted with our failings. Tim Keller observes:

" Know that your worst character flaws are the ones you can see the least. By definition the sins to which you are most blind, that you make the most excuses for, and that you usually minimise - are the ones that most have you in their grip.

- How can this group aid one another in identifying and repenting of besetting sins?

- What would that look like in view of v1-2?

Q3 How can you judge whether to:

a) persevere in sharing the Gospel with a dismissive person;

or b) shake the dust from your feet (Matt 10:14)?

Ask your Dad

Matt. 7:7-12

Jesus' confident invitation to ask, seek, and knock flows from the same spring of teaching in 6:25-34 - namely that God is a good Father who loves us and delights to provide good things for us.

Verse by verse

7-8 Asking, seeking, and knocking are all metaphors for prayer. The tense of the original language indicates Jesus is probably referring to an ongoing action, rather than a once off. That is, he expects prayer to be an ongoing (daily) activity - which is in keeping with the Lord's Prayer (cf. 'Give us today our daily bread').

As with the entire sermon, it would be unwise to absolutise this section of teaching. Jesus doesn't mean that 'whoever asks, receives exactly what they want'. God is a good Father who gives abundantly according to his wisdom and purpose - not a vending machine or a Genie.

9-11 Once again, the reassurance Jesus gives to those who seek God in prayer is the fact that God is not a distant deity, but a loving Father. Even the 'evil' fathers of this age know how to provide for their kids - *how much more*, the perfect Father.

12 The whole section of 6:19-7:11, which has focussed on living righteously in relation to the world reaches its climax in v12. The so-called Golden Rule is known around the world and rightly serves as the quintessential example of Jesus' teaching on interpersonal relationships.

Discussion starters

Q1 Fundamental to Jesus' teaching on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount is his understanding of God as Father.

- How would you explain the fundamentals of prayer to a new Christian or a primary school child?

- What shifts in thinking need to happen in your own prayer life in light of what you've been taught by Jesus in his sermon?

Q2 "God is not a Genie..." Reflect on the following quote from John Stott:

"The best way to approach this problem is to remember that the promises of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount are not unconditional. A moment's thought will convince us of this. It is absurd to suppose that the promise 'Ask, and it shall be given you' is an absolute pledge with no strings attached; that 'Knock, and it will be opened to you' is an 'Open Sesame' to every closed door without exception; and that by the waving of a prayer wand any wish will be granted and every dream will come true. The idea is ridiculous. It would turn prayer into magic, the person who prays into a magician like Aladdin, and God into our servant who appears instantly to do our bidding like Aladdin's genie every time we rub our little prayer lamp. (The Message of the Sermon on the Mount. The Bible Speaks Today, John Stott)

Q3 v12 is a simple yet deeply profound maxim to live by. To what degree are you conscious of this teaching in your everyday interactions with people?

Pick your path

Matt. 7:13-29

With this passage, we reach the conclusion of our journey through the Sermon on the Mount. It's fitting, then, that Jesus finishes his sermon by driving home some of its key themes. Using three metaphors, the Preacher reminds us of the fundamental difference between external appearance and internal reality. He puts before us the stark choice between two ways to live: one that leads to flourishing, the other that leads to destruction. And he reminds us that *doing* the will of God (living righteously) is key to entering the Kingdom.

Verse by verse

13-14 Traditionally the wide and narrow paths have been understood as metaphors for sinful/pious living. But this is the error that Jesus has been warning against throughout: true righteousness is heart-deep, not merely external.

Therefore, the paths represent the two kinds of righteousness that Jesus has been describing through the whole sermon. External righteousness is easy (wide), while heart-deep righteousness is narrow (hard). The point is that the former leads to destruction, while the latter leads to life.

15-23 This complex set of metaphors can be confusing because of the switch between wolves and fruit. The overall message is one of warning: false teachers are dangerous because it's hard to see through their external appearance. Wolves are easy to see, unless they are dressed as sheep. Same with a tree and its fruit: it takes time to see the quality of the fruit produced.

Continuing the theme of external vs. Internal, the point is that we shouldn't be too enamoured with external gifts and displays of righteousness. It's what's inside that counts.

24-27 In a similar way, the metaphor of the two builders highlights the inward/unseen vs the external. The design of the house, the materials used etc. are in some sense irrelevant. It's the unseen foundation that counts for everything.

28-29 The astonishment of the congregation is grounded in Jesus remarkable authority. He speaks not like a scribe, or even a prophet, but as one with the authority of God himself.

Discussion starters

Q1 In this sermon, Jesus has clearly laid out what it means to follow him.

- Are you a disciple of Jesus?
- How would you describe what a Christian is to someone who has no idea?

Q2 How can Red Door be sure it isn't being led by wolves in sheep's clothing?

Q3 How can anyone be sure Jesus won't say to them "*I never knew you*"?

Q4 The wise builder doesn't just hear and understand Jesus' words - *she acts on them*. How can this group encourage action rather than mere understanding?

Q5 The crowds were astonished at Jesus' teaching. What is the phrase/idea/passage/theme that has most impacted you in this series?

Next steps

Pick a path

Join a group

Pick a path

Jesus is calling you to follow him. I can say this without knowing anything about you! It's almost too good to be true, but Jesus wants you to know, trust, obey, and follow him irrespective of your past, culture, occupation, gender, or identity.

If you have been drawn to Jesus through he study of his Sermon, and would like to live the good life of human flourishing, then welcome! You've chosen the narrow path that leads to life.

However...

Join a group

Not for a second did Jesus expect anyone to follow him on their own. In fact, it's just not possible to live the life he's described without doing so in community.

I want to to *strongly encourage you* to join a church that seeks to follow Jesus in all of life. I also want to *plead with you* to join a small group (or something similar) to ensure that you are lovingly encouraged to actively live out the teaching of Jesus in your own context.

If you've decided to follow Jesus, made a re-commitment to do so, or would like to find a community of fellow-followers, please let me know - I'd love to serve you any way I can.

Thanks for taking this journey with me into The Good Life!

Grace and peace,

Jonathan

jonathan@reddoorchurch.com.au



2022 | Red Door Resources