

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

A Study of Matthew 5-7

Sermon on the Mount: A Study of Matthew 5–7
by C.J. Harris, PhD

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Introduction

The Sermon on the Mount is practical Christianity. With one critical teaching after another, Jesus cuts through centuries of tradition, laws, and culture to reveal a picture of life in God's kingdom. He overturns outward formalism and impossible religious codes, speaking directly to the heart of the gathered crowd. His path is different than anything they have seen or imagined.

Even today, the Sermon feels countercultural. The world system favors the powerful, the proud, and the self-serving. But Jesus blesses the meek—the peacemakers that hunger for His righteousness. Ignoring earthly distractions, we pursue God's kingdom above all else. If we, by His grace, walk the path shown here, we become salt and light in a world of decay and darkness. Jesus calls us to do good and reflect the Father's glory.

I wrote this study out of a desire to become a better citizen of the kingdom. Yet every time I read these passages, the words of Jesus pull me back to prayer, seeking His grace. I trust your own study reminds you of our complete dependence on God. And as you read, I pray you'll store up many of the same heavenly treasures that have enriched me.

By His Grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "C.J. Harris". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "C" and "H".

C.J. Harris

In This Study

This curriculum features two primary components: a Teacher’s Manual and a Student Manual. The Teacher’s Manual includes the bulk of the course material, with 13 lessons covering the Sermon on the Mount verse by verse. In the Student Manual are exercises that help students prepare for each lecture.

On the day you begin teaching through this study, distribute the Student Manuals to your group. Present the first lecture while your students complete the first lesson outline in their books. When you conclude the first lesson, ask your students to complete the three reading exercises in Lesson 2 prior to the next class. For each lesson going forward, students can prepare for your lectures by completing that lesson’s readings.

	Before Class	During Class
Teacher		Presents lecture
Student	Completes reading exercises for the given lesson*	Fills in lesson outline

*Again, Lesson 1 includes no reading exercises, since you’ll introduce the study with the Lesson 1 lecture.

In the Student Manual

Reading Exercises—These sections challenge students to study Scripture on their own before answering questions that encourage retention and critical thinking. Starting with Lesson 2, each lesson includes three major readings.

Lesson Preview—Beginning with Lesson 3, these questions give students a chance to consider discussion topics you might bring up during the lecture.

Teacher’s Lesson Outlines—This section summarizes the main points of the lecture while serving as a foundation for the students’ own notes.

In the Teacher’s Manual

Lectures and Discussion—These notes can help you present Matthew 5–7 to your students. Discussion questions and contextual notes refer back to exercises your students may complete in the Student Manual. Underlined words correspond to blanks in the Teacher’s Lesson Outlines.

Student Manual Facsimiles—At the end of each lesson, you can find copies of the Student Manual exercises with suggested answers filled in.

Important Note: You can download free presentation slides for this curriculum at the *Sermon on the Mount* product page on positiveaction.org.

Scope & Sequence

Student Exercise Topics	Teacher’s Lesson Objectives
Lesson 1: An Introduction to the Sermon	
No readings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress the significance of the Sermon on the Mount to Christian doctrine • Introduce the Sermon’s context • Outline different interpretations of the Sermon
Lesson 2: An Outline of the Sermon	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matthew 5 – Introduction to the chapter • Matthew 6 – Introduction to the chapter • Matthew 7 – Introduction to the chapter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preview the major themes of the Sermon
Lesson 3: The Beatitudes—Portrait of a Christian, Part 1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matthew 18:21–25 – The parable of the unmerciful servant • Isaiah 40 – Hope in the sovereignty of God • Psalms 37 – The fates of the wicked and the righteous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline an interpretative approach to the Beatitudes • Define and discuss the first four Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3–6)
Lesson 4: The Beatitudes—Portrait of a Christian, Part 2	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matthew 15:1–20 – The heart as the source of impurity • John 11:1–44 – The death of Lazarus and the compassion of Christ • Romans 8 – The hope and security of believers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the progression of the Beatitudes • Define and discuss the second four Beatitudes (Matt. 5:7–10)
Lesson 5: Salt and Light	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John 15 – Life for Christ’s disciples after His departure • Romans 12 – Exercising gifts out of gratitude to God • 1 John 1:1–2:6 – Walking in the light 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish persecution as normative for Christians (Matt. 5:11–12) • Explain the role of believers as “salt” and “light” (vv. 13–16)

Lesson 6: Christ and the Law	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matthew 22:34–40; Deuteronomy 6 – The essence of the Law • Galatians 3 – Grace and the Law • Romans 3 – The legacy of the Law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore Christ’s relationship to the Old Testament Law (Matt. 5:17) • Note the eternity of the Law (v. 18) • Stress the unmeetable requirements of God’s righteousness (vv. 19–20)
Lesson 7: But I Say to You, Part 1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matthew 21:1–17; 23:13–39 – Christ’s entrance into Jerusalem; the cleansing of the temple; the seven woes • James 3:1–4:12 – Self-discipline and humility • Genesis 2:15–3:21 – The Fall and the corruption of marriage 	<p>Explain Christ’s teaching on . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger and murder (Matt. 5:21–26) • Lust and immorality (vv. 27–30)
Lesson 8: But I Say to You, Part 2	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matthew 19:1–12 – Christ’s response to the Pharisees’ question on divorce • Ephesians 4 – Unity and identity in Christian assemblies • Luke 23:26–49; 1 Peter 3:8–20 – Reflecting Christ’s love and sacrifice 	<p>Explain Christ’s teaching on . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divorce and adultery (Matt. 5:31–32) • Oaths and presumption (vv. 33–37) • Suffering and retribution (vv. 38–42) • Enemies and hatred (vv. 43–47)
Lesson 9: Who Sees Your Piety?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Corinthians 13 – The necessity of love to service • Acts 4:32–5:16 – Ananias, Sapphira, and the lust for prestige • Luke 5:27–39 – Fasting and the use of ritual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinguish godly piety from self-focused piety (Matt. 6:1) • Explore God-focused approaches to alms-giving, prayer, and fasting (vv. 2–18)
Lesson 10: Our Lord’s Model Prayer	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John 17 – Christ’s prayer for His disciples • Ephesians 6:10–20 – The need for God’s protection • James 1:1–18 – The blessings of perseverance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present the Lord’s Prayer as a model, not a rite • Review the praises and requests in the prayer (Matt. 6:9–15)

Lesson 11: Our Treasure	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matthew 19:16–20:16 – The conversation between Christ and a wealthy young man • Deuteronomy 15:1–11 – The treatment of the poor in the Old Testament Law • Psalms 34 – Praising God after troubles past 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contrast the pursuit of earthly and heavenly treasure (Matt. 6:19–24) • Present the believer’s transcendent focus as an expression of trust in God (vv. 25–34)
Lesson 12: The Golden Rule	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proverbs 1:1–19; 3:1–35 – The pursuit of true wisdom • Romans 14:1–15:7 – Exercising freedom while showing love to believers with a sensitive conscience • 1 John 3:11–4:21 – The assurance and security of godly love 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the meaning of Christ’s command not to judge, excluding common misconceptions (Matt. 7:1–6) • Emphasize the need for believers to reflect God’s grace (vv. 7–12)
Lesson 13: Two Ways	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psalms 1 – The paths of the righteous and the wicked • Psalms 23 – The care of the Shepherd • Psalms 139 – David’s cry for judgment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contrast the ways of righteousness and wickedness (Matt. 7:13–14) • Explore Christ’s descriptions of false and true believers (vv. 15–23) • Note the immediate response to Christ’s teaching (7:28–8:1)

Feedback

As a non-profit publishing ministry, we consider teachers our co-laborers in the faith. Each curriculum remains a work in progress, and the people who teach these studies have a great impact on the scope and format of every new edition. If you have any comments, questions, or concerns, please don’t hesitate to contact us—we’d love to hear from you.

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Scripture Memory

Sermon on the Mount

Lesson	Scripture	Signature
1	Matthew 4:17	
2	Luke 4:43	
3	Matthew 5:3-6	
4	Matthew 5:7-10	
5	Matthew 5:14, 16	
6	Matthew 5:17-18	
7	Matthew 5:29	
8	Matthew 5:43-44	
9	Matthew 6:1	
10	Matthew 6:9-13	
11	Matthew 6:24	
12	Matthew 7:12	
13	Matthew 7:13-14	

LESSON 1

An Introduction to the Sermon

Primary Text

Matthew 5:1–2

Objectives

- ⦿ Stress the significance of the Sermon on the Mount to Christian doctrine
- ⦿ Introduce the Sermon's context
- ⦿ Outline different interpretations of the Sermon

Introduction

Today we start a journey through familiar lands. Perhaps the best-known message ever preached is the Sermon on the Mount, and we'll spend the next few months studying and re-studying these passages. These verses run together like pearls on string—each is packed with truth, meaning, and beauty. But we'll look beyond their individual value to the arc they trace altogether. If we do so, we may just understand why the crowds listening were so amazed at this teaching (cf. Matt. 7:28).

Jesus didn't merely teach people—He *un*-taught them, as well. To help them understand, He had to disentangle the wrong things they thought they knew about the Law, about morality, about God. Jesus had to tear down the prideful, attention-seeking religion of the Pharisees. He had to blow apart the cold, hyper-intellectual religion of the Sadducees. In a world of suffering and confusion, Jesus strode past the bickering leaders and met directly with the people. He got their attention with love—He spent time healing them (cf. Luke 6:17–19). And then He said, in effect, “You’ve heard it taught that way, but here’s what *I* have to say” (cf. Matt. 5:21ff).

Only Jesus could capture their attention and show them the very mind of God. He didn't merely list the *what* or *how* of righteousness—the rules, the practices, the behavior—He explained the *why* behind it all. Only God could know what He

thought while giving Moses the Law. This was new; this was exciting; and this turned the world upside down.

The Source Text

We should note that we can find this sermon detailed in two different passages: Matthew 5–7 and the latter half of Luke 6. We’ll focus on the chapters in Matthew, but reference Luke as needed.

The Name

But before we get too far—why are these passages called the “Sermon on the Mount”? No trick question here—because Jesus taught this on a mountain (cf. Matt. 5:1). Of course, when we picture the mountain in our heads, we shouldn’t think *Yosemite* or *Everest*. Many people heard this sermon, and Jesus didn’t make them huff and puff their way up a rocky cliff. Instead, He probably taught from an elevated area along the north banks of the Galilean Sea. Imagine rolling hills with good acoustics, and you get the idea.

I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SERMON

The location explains the name, but what about the *point*? Why do teachers and scholars spend so much time on this sermon? Why do these passages deserve special attention?

A. It’s the longest sermon recorded in the New Testament.

First, it’s really big. Matthew spends three chapters and 107 verses on the message itself (111 verses minus 4 verses of introduction and conclusion). This section is 10% of Matthew’s gospel—about as much as the account of Christ’s arrest, death, and resurrection put together. No other sermon in the New Testament comes close. Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7 comes in at only 52 verses.

Context—An Outline, Not a Transcript

And to be clear, Matthew 5–7 gives us only the *outline*. This is a summary of what Jesus said—not the full, word-for-word transcript. Compare the passages in Matthew and Luke, and you’ll see that they bring out different details—so Jesus may have brought up other topics, illustrations, or arguments. The disciples wrote down the essentials, the parts that the Spirit inspired them to record.

B. It's the most complete sermon of Jesus recorded in the Scriptures.

Second, this is the one *Jesus sermon* that we have. Other gospels include long discourses—conversations, debates—but nowhere else can we find Christ's preaching so neatly and completely put together. We can find other long passages like the "Bread of Life" discourse in John 6, but that's less of a lecture and more of a discussion.

Regardless, we understand from the gospels that Jesus preached a lot. He spoke in many cities and villages, and crowds followed Him almost everywhere. But Scripture includes just this one sermon. Presumably, this sermon summarized Jesus' core teachings from his three-year ministry.

C. It includes many memorable passages.

Finally, this sermon is a treasure trove. Matthew 5–7 features a variety of messages and imagery that have become Christian shorthand—the touchstones of our moral principles. It's almost impossible to have a lengthy discussion about Christian teaching without referring to some of these verses.

We won't dive into all these verses now, but you probably recognize some of them. This sermon is simply *dense* with material like the following:

1. The Beatitudes (5:3–12), including "Blessed are the meek," and others
2. The imagery of believers as "salt" and "light" (5:13–16)
3. The promise that no part of the Law will pass away (5:18)
4. The warning to cut off your own hand if it leads you to sin (5:29–30)
5. The warnings about divorce and immorality (5:31–32)
6. The command to "turn the other cheek" (5:39)
7. The command to "go the extra mile" (5:41)
8. The command to love your enemies (5:44–45)
9. The idea of a "prayer closet" (6:6)
10. The model of prayer we call "the Lord's Prayer" (6:9–13)
11. The encouragement to "lay up treasures in heaven" (6:19–21)
12. The warning that we "cannot serve two masters" (6:24)
13. The encouragement to let tomorrow worry about itself (6:25–34)
14. The command to "seek first the kingdom of God" (6:33)

15. The warning to “judge not, that you be not judged” (7:1)
16. The encouragement to ask, seek, and knock (7:7–8)
17. The principle we call “the Golden Rule” (7:12)
18. The imagery of the “straight and narrow” path (7:13–14)
19. The idea of judging a tree “by its fruit” (7:16–20)
20. The warning that not all who say, “Lord, Lord,” will enter heaven (7:21)
21. The imagery of houses built on “rock” or “sand” (7:24–27)

This list isn’t exhaustive, but it gives you an idea of how many memorable concepts come from this Sermon. Even non-Christians use some of these phrases—because these ideas are rooted deeply in the English language and Western culture in general.

II. THE CONTEXT OF THE SERMON

As important as this message is, we must understand its context, its setting, its place. If we don’t understand the environment and culture in which Christ taught, we’ll have trouble following His thoughts. So throughout this study, we’ll bring up context. But for now, let’s look at the literary and geographical context of the sermon.

A. The sermon’s place in the Book of Matthew

1. *Matthew 1–2: Genealogy & Nativity*

Matthew begins with the royal genealogy of Christ. It starts with Abraham and runs through David and Solomon, through the exiles in Babylon, and finally down to Joseph, who was the husband of Mary, to whom Jesus was born. Even though Joseph wasn’t Jesus’ biological father, Jesus was his heir, and therefore part of the royal line—right where the prophets said the Messiah would be (cf. Gen. 49:10; Isa. 9:7; John 7:42)

After the genealogy, Matthew goes on to describe the nativity—the incarnation, the birth of Christ—along with a detail you won’t find in the other Gospels. When Jesus is only a few years old, a group of *magi* or wise men come to visit, bearing expensive gifts.

Discussion

Why does Matthew spend so much time on Christ’s genealogy and the visit of the magi? Because of Matthew’s audience and theme. Matthew

wrote this book to show his fellow Jews that Jesus was the prophesied King of Israel—the Messiah who would one day sit on the throne of David.

2. *Matthew 3: Baptism of Jesus*

Then in Matthew 3, we find the baptism of Christ. We see the ministry of John the Baptist—the way he prepared the people to receive the teaching of Christ.

Then Jesus arrives in verse 13 to be baptized. John doesn't feel worthy to baptize the Messiah, but Jesus insists. At this point, all three Members of the Trinity mark their presence—Christ in the water; the Holy Spirit descending like a dove; and the voice of the Father. All this makes clear that God approves of Jesus' ministry.

3. *Matthew 4: Temptation & Early Ministry*

In Matthew 4, we find two big sections. Verses 1–11 detail the temptation of Christ in the wilderness—where He shows His power over Satan and sin itself.

In the second half of the chapter, Matthew summarizes Christ's early ministry. Three big points to note here:

a. **Jesus preached a message: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven draws near.” (v. 17).**

First, Christ begins preaching. In verse 17, Matthew summarizes the theme of these messages—repentance, the need to turn back to God. Jesus claims that God's kingdom is coming soon, but He doesn't yet explain how.

Context—A Spiritual Kingdom

Today, we understand that Christ built up a spiritual kingdom—one in which believers are citizens and God Himself is King. This kingdom isn't bound to one territory or one ethnicity. It's an invisible kingdom of grace, founded on the gospel. Anyone can become a citizen through faith in Christ.

In Christ's day, people understood this message as a continuation of John's teaching. John and Jesus seemed to be saying the same thing. In fact, after John the Baptist was executed, Herod Tetrarch feared that Jesus must be John resurrected from the dead (cf. Matt. 14:1–2).

Again, Matthew includes this message of the kingdom to emphasize his theme: the Christ has arrived as the King, the Son of David.

b. Jesus calls the first disciples (vv. 18–22).

During this time, Jesus begins calling individuals to be His disciples, His student-followers. A number of people likely follow Him at this point, but He selects four to travel and serve alongside Him. Eventually this number will grow to twelve (cf. Luke 6:13–16).

Context—Masters and Disciples

This practice was a common form of education in that day. Wealthy parents could pay to have their children accompany famous teachers, or famous teachers could choose their own students from the best and brightest.

In the Old Testament, we see this arrangement between the prophet Elijah and his student Elisha. Elisha would take care of Elijah’s needs, running errands and washing the prophet’s feet like a servant.

But Jesus turns a lot of the teacher-disciple relationship on its head. First, He doesn’t necessarily pick the best and the brightest, nor does He pick people who offer to pay Him. Second, He makes a point of serving His disciples—washing their feet and therefore teaching them humility (cf. John 13:1–17). Christians lead not by securing authority but by serving others.

c. Jesus heals many people and increases His fame (vv. 23–25).

Again, John the Baptist helped prepare the way for Jesus. John told his followers to keep an eye out for God’s kingdom, and many did. When Jesus begins His ministry, John tells His followers that this man from Nazareth is the one they’ve waited for. And when John is executed, many of his followers join Christ’s disciples.

At this point in Matthew, many people follow Jesus. He travels throughout Galilee in Israel, and His fame spreads through all of Syria to the north. As He heals people and casts out demons, He gathers around Him huge crowds—people from Galilee and the Decapolis, from Jerusalem and Judea, and even from beyond Jordan. These people are primarily Jews—Christ hasn’t yet reached out to Samaritans—but the crowds continue to grow.

Why do they follow Christ? Mainly because of His miracles. He hasn’t yet fed the thousands, but He has healed people—and not just from one or two diseases, but from every possible problem they bring to Him. Sickness, pain, seizures, paralysis, even spiritual afflictions—He cures them all. This shows love, yes, but it also presents Christ Himself as the solution to any problem.

And now, in case people had any misunderstandings—in case the miracles distort or overshadow the preaching—Jesus clarifies His message. Matthew has introduced the King, and now, in Matthew 5, the King begins to speak.

B. The sermon's place in Israel

As we noted before, the “mount” wasn't a high snowy peak.

1. *On the north shore of the Sea of Galilee*

Jesus likely preached from a gentle slope that formed a natural amphitheater. He brought the twelve disciples to the top of a mound, with a valley going down one side toward the sea. Jesus stands at the top, but His voice carries down valley where the people listen.

2. *Near the town of Capernaum*

This area is near Capernaum, one of several towns Christ used as centers for His ministry.

III. INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SERMON

Before we begin working through the Sermon, we should note that different scholars and teachers approach the message in different ways. To understand some of the debates surrounding the Sermon—and debates surrounding Christianity in general—let's give names to these different interpretations.

A. The Social Gospel View

The *social gospel* emphasizes the physical work of the kingdom, sometimes to the neglect of the spiritual. Within this view, the Sermon becomes the most important set of instructions in the New Testament—maybe the *only* important instructions. The social gospel presents Christianity as a way to make the physical world a better place. As Christians, then, we live to love others, be kind, and redeem the world through collective acts of good.

Much of that sounds good, but the social gospel often forgets that the problems on Earth are spiritual, not physical. And spiritual problems need a spiritual solution—which Jesus provided by dying and rising again. We should feed and clothe people—just like Jesus did—but that will only delay death for a little while. Kindness won't save anyone from hell. We all need true life in Christ.

Another problem with the social gospel view is scalability. People who hold to the social gospel also often believe that they can usher in the physical

kingdom of God through their work. If enough people follow the Sermon on the Mount, we'd have heaven on Earth. To build heaven, though, you need a lot of people, a lot of money, and preferably the help of a friendly government. This explains why, in church history, we see the social gospel become popular in times of peace and prosperity—like in the West during the 1800s and early 1900s.

But the Sermon speaks to individuals as well as groups, and it includes passages about persecution and opposition (cf. Matt. 5:10–12). God can show grace through just one person—anyone willing to be salt in a world without taste, to be light in the darkness (cf. vv. 13–16). More often than not, Jesus' disciples find themselves in the minority, and that's OK.

B. The Future Fulfillment View

The *future fulfillment view* argues that the Sermon doesn't really matter until the end times, when Christ returns and establishes His physical kingdom. People with this view—including theologian and author Charles Ryrie—suggest that Christ offered His physical kingdom to the Jews, but since they rejected Him, we must wait to see the real kingdom until Jesus returns. The Sermon therefore gives us a picture of how people will live in this future world.

Obviously, there's a check on this view in the verses that describe persecution or trouble. Some passages clearly address the problems we face today—problems that won't exist in Christ's future kingdom. At least some of this Sermon applies to us right now.

C. The Mosaic Addendum View

This view argues that Christ preached the Sermon to expand upon the Law that God gave Moses. If the Old Testament Law focused on our actions, then the New Testament addendum addresses our thoughts and our heart.

But we don't see this kind of shift between the Testaments. God cares just as much about hearts in the Old Testament as He does in the New Testament. God never changes, and He's always wanted heart-level obedience from His children. When He commanded people not to kill on Mt. Sinai, He also didn't want them to despise others. Jesus didn't change that—He just explained the intent of the Mosaic civil law more clearly.

D. The Spiritual Citizen View

This view—held by the author—claims that Christ offered this Sermon as an explanation of how to live as a citizen of His spiritual kingdom. It's His expectation for our thoughts and behavior right now.

As believers, as children of God, we live between two worlds—with one foot in the physical, and one in the kingdom to come. We are citizens of heaven, but we serve on Earth.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:12. God has called us—right now—to serve as part of His kingdom. The Sermon, therefore, shows us what He expects from us.

If we approach the Sermon this way, we understand that God wants us to be salt and light—to provide a counterpoint to the diseased culture that surrounds us. God saves us and indeed scatters us around the world precisely so we can shine against the darkness. We are ambassadors.

God's kingdom, if it is spiritual, cannot be bound by ethnicity or political movements or gender or whatever socio-economic barrier we could think of. Christ can redeem anyone, and all His disciples, by God's grace, can live out the principles in this Sermon.

Conclusion

Discussion—A Sermon for Us

So why should we study the sermon? What do you hope to learn from it? How can it help us communicate the gospel? Three quick things to consider:

- God gave the sermon a prominent place in the first Gospel. Again, Matthew spend a tenth of his time on this message.
- The sermon reveals the desire of our King's heart for us. It shows His hopes and expectations for His children.
- The sermon reminds us of our need for God. The Ten Commandments seem easy by comparison. We can do none of this without His grace. True righteousness comes from Him.

LESSON 1

An Introduction to the Sermon

Teacher's Lesson

The Source Texts

Matthew 5–7

Luke 6:17–49

I. The Significance of the Sermon

- A. It's the **longest** _____ sermon recorded in the New Testament.
- B. It's the **most complete** _____ sermon of Jesus recorded in the Scriptures.
- C. It includes many **memorable** _____ passages, including . . .
 - 1. The Beatitudes (5:3–12), including “Blessed are the meek,” and others
 - 2. The imagery of believers as “salt” and “light” (5:13–16)
 - 3. The promise that no part of the Law will pass away (5:18)
 - 4. The warning to cut off your own hand if it leads you to sin (5:29–30)
 - 5. The warnings about divorce and immorality (5:31–32)
 - 6. The command to “turn the other cheek” (5:39)

7. The command to “go the extra mile” (5:41)
8. The command to love your enemies (5:44–45)
9. The idea of a “prayer closet” (6:6)
10. The model of prayer we call “the Lord’s Prayer” (6:9–13)
11. The encouragement to “lay up treasures in heaven” (6:19–21)
12. The warning that we “cannot serve two masters” (6:24)
13. The encouragement to let tomorrow worry about itself (6:25–34)
14. The command to “seek first the kingdom of God” (6:33)
15. The warning to “judge not, that you be not judged” (7:1)
16. The encouragement to ask, seek, and knock (7:7–8)
17. The principle we call “the Golden Rule” (7:12)
18. The imagery of the “straight and narrow” path (7:13–14)
19. The idea of judging a tree “by its fruit” (7:16–20)
20. The warning that not all who say, “Lord, Lord,” will enter heaven (7:21)
21. The imagery of houses built on “rock” or “sand” (7:24–27)

II. The Context of the Sermon

A. The sermon’s place in the Book of Matthew

1. Matthew 1–2: Genealogy & Nativity
2. Matthew 3: Baptism of Jesus
3. Matthew 4: Temptation & Early Ministry
 - a. Jesus preached a message: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven draws near” (v. 17).
 - b. Jesus calls the first disciples (vv. 18–22).
 - c. Jesus heals many people and increases His fame (vv. 23–25).

B. The sermon's place in Israel

1. On the north shore of the Sea of Galilee
2. Near the town of Capernaum

III. Interpretations of the Sermon

A. The Social Gospel View

Within this view, the Sermon becomes the primary set of instructions for believers, whose purpose is to make the physical world a better place.

B. The Future Fulfillment View

Within this view, the Sermon doesn't matter as much until the end times, when Christ will return and establish His physical kingdom.

C. The Mosaic Addendum View

Within this view, the Sermon expands upon the Old Testament Law, addressing inner motivations in addition to outer actions.

D. The Spiritual Citizen View

This view—held by the author—claims that Christ offered this Sermon as an explanation of how to live as a citizen of His spiritual kingdom. These principles represent His expectations for us right now.

LESSON 2

An Outline of the Sermon

Primary Text

Matthew 5–7

Objective

- Preview the major themes of the Sermon

Introduction

For this lesson, we're going to run through all three chapters of the Sermon on the Mount. If you completed the readings for this lesson, then you've already breezed through this material. But before we dive together into the verse-by-verse detail, let's discuss the big ideas and broad structure of the sermon. For the rest of the study, if you ever get overwhelmed by the details, check back with this outline to remind yourself of the main points.

THE BASIC OUTLINE

We'll begin with the simplest outline possible—just two big points. If, as we discussed in the last lesson, Jesus gave the sermon to explore the role of citizens in His spiritual kingdom, then we might outline it as follows.

Teacher's Note: Address the two biggest points below before filling in the rest of the outline.

A. What citizens of the kingdom are (5:3–16)

In the first verses of Matthew 5, Jesus describes what Christians should be like. We could call this the core or foundation of the sermon, because the rest of the sermon assumes that you, the believer, reflect what's stated here. If you

lack the heart-attitudes in these first verses, then you cannot live the life that Christ describes later. Your inner being is most important.

Focus—The Necessity of Redemption

If we want to live out this sermon, God must work in our hearts. Christ must redeem us, and the Spirit must mold us. We don't receive that through food or medical care, but through the knowledge of Christ. That's why God's kingdom will advance first and foremost through the teaching of His Word.

B. What citizens of the kingdom do (5:17–7:27)

So for the rest of the sermon, Jesus describes what His followers will and will not do. He assures people that He hasn't come to destroy the Old Testament Law, but to fulfill it. He Himself kept the Law perfectly, and in this sermon, He explains how we too can meet God's highest moral expectations.

The Pharisees had found ways to reject the spirit of the Law while keeping most of the letter. They bound themselves up in ritual and practice while ignoring the heart and soul of faith. In this sermon, Jesus explains how truly good works arise from a truly good heart.

OUTLINE OF THE SERMON

With those points sketched out, let's map the individual sections.

A. What citizens of the kingdom are (5:3–16)

1. Our heart-attitudes (vv. 3–10)

Again, these first verses describe the supernatural state of a Christian. If we follow Christ, our hearts will tend toward this direction, because we will tend toward Jesus. He is the perfect embodiment of all these principles, not just because he was “poor in spirit” or “persecuted for righteousness' sake,” but because He is the pure, Holy One of God. To spot a Christian in our messed-up world today, look for these attributes.

2. Our purpose in this world (vv. 11–16)

Starting in verse 11, Jesus speaks to our purpose—why are we here? Why do we bother facing all this trouble? He explains that we, as “salt” and “light” in this world, exist to give glory to the Father—to show others how great God is.

We *are* children of God to represent His holiness, His majesty, His grace. It's not about us; it's about Him.

Note also that salted food contrasts with unsalted food around it, just as light contrasts with darkness. If we follow Christ, we will stand out, and not always in pleasant or comfortable ways. If we stick true to Jesus' teachings, we will sometimes invite persecution. But at the same time, we will help others know God better.

B. What citizens of the kingdom do (5:17–7:27)

This study divides the second big point into three sections about what we, as citizens, do. Our faith does not hide inside of us—it grows stronger; it flowers; and it bears fruit.

Context—Active Faith

In Romans, Paul warns against a purely internal faith (cf. 6:1–14). We shouldn't accept Jesus' grace just so we can sin and live the way we want. That's not how we walk with the Spirit (cf. Eph. 5:15–21).

Likewise, James argues that our faith is “justified”—it's shown to other people—by the good things we do (cf. James 2:14–17). True religion is found in the ways we show God's love—like taking care of the fatherless, the widowed, the people who need love the most (1:27).

1. *Our relationship to the Law (5:17–48)*

For the rest of Matthew 5, Jesus explains how we believers can relate to the Law. Again, Jesus assures people that He hasn't come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it—in His own life, and also in the lives of His followers.

a. **We fulfill it in letter and in spirit.**

As God Himself, Jesus authored the Old Testament Law, so He understood the spirit and intent behind it. Behind every rule is a principle even more important.

So as Spirit-filled believers, we cannot only refuse to murder people, but we can also refuse to hate them. Not only can we flee from sexual sin, but we can also tear down the corruptive, objectifying, lust-filled thinking that leads us in that direction.

Context—The Old Testament Civil Law

Note that the Old Testament Law, by its nature as a civil code for Israel, had to punish outer, external sins. It couldn't regulate inner attitudes. How do you convict someone of hatred or an inappropriate look? But God still cared about the Israelites' inner being.

The civil code and ceremonial structures of the Old Testament represented God's application of the Law in a specific setting, for a chosen people, for a specific time. Though temporary (Heb. 8:5; 10:1), these laws pictured the character of God and showed that His people should glorify Him.

Focus—Walking with the Spirit

As we walk with Spirit—as we learn more about God and what He's done for us—He will help us avoid sin and, just as importantly, develop the same mind and attitude He has. We won't just avoid hating people, we will show mercy. We will care for others like God cares for us.

b. We follow it to love others.

And that leads us to the second way we relate to the Law. We obey the Law in order to love others—not bolster our own reputation.

Note that the Pharisees used various rules in the Law to attack others and control their behavior. They thought the Law's function was to distinguish between righteous people—like themselves—and all the unrighteous people. They used the Torah like a backscratcher—something to make themselves feel good and comfortable. They didn't understand that we are all fundamentally unrighteous.

Illustration—Grammar Nazis

Some people describe themselves as “grammar Nazis,” ready and willing to point out mistakes in other people's language. They relish pointing out a missing comma or a misplaced modifier. But the point of grammar isn't to cut people down and establish an elite force of writers who use only the purest language. Languages have grammar rules to help us communicate better—it's inclusive, not exclusive. Like all forms of etiquette, it should help people feel comfortable, not on edge.

The rules we follow might evolve and change, but the principles of true, clear communication remain. So instead of beating people down with rules they don't understand, try lifting them up with principles they already know, and then teach them better grammar over time.

So Jesus ends the section in Matthew 5 with a command—love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. This is God’s kind of love—the *agape* love—because we can’t expect anything in return. Christ died for us while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8), and we should love people even when they despise us.

Later in Matthew we learn that this love is God’s highest command (cf. 22:36–40). If we love others the way we should, we fulfill the entire Law of God (Gal. 5:14). Love will honor Him, and it will introduce Him to others.

2. *The faith behind our devotion (6:1–34)*

In Matthew 6, Jesus details a number of ways we can express our faith in God. Again, He describes not only what we should do, but *why* we should do it. How will a true citizen of God’s kingdom act and think in confidence?

a. **We serve and worship to please God (vv. 1–18).**

In the first half of the chapter, Jesus warns against serving or praying for selfish motives. When we give to the needy just to get approval from our friends, or when we pray out loud just to appear spiritual, we corrupt the purpose of those activities.

Rightly understood, charity is a way to reflect God’s love—to express our faith in Him. Likewise, prayer is a way to commune with God—to trust Him to supply our needs. When we pray out loud to get other people’s approval, we might as well pray *to* other people—because their opinion is apparently the only opinion that counts. But our great God loves us absolutely—why should we kill ourselves trying to impress someone else?

We worship and serve entirely to please God—not because we think we can earn His approval on our own, but because we wish to celebrate all the grace He’s given us (cf. 2 Cor. 9:6–15). Sharing is joy, and joy is sharing. Again, this kind of selfless love is true devotion.

b. **We lay up treasures in our true kingdom (vv. 19–24).**

Our focus will influence our values. If we focus entirely on the physical world, we will treasure the here and now more than things of eternal value. But as we focus on God—who He is, what He values, how He works—we will treasure what He does.

Illustration—Vacation Furniture

Imagine you win an all-expenses-paid vacation to Hawaii, the Big Island, and you travel there for a week of rest and relaxation. You arrive at a

nice beachside cabin, with perfect views on every side and almost total isolation. You walk in to a gorgeous living room with ocean-facing windows. The fridge is stocked with your favorite foods, and of course you have high-speed internet—everything you'd ever need for a perfect week.

But then you notice that the one easy chair on the back porch is an uncomfortable eyesore with a garish floral pattern. You now have a choice. Will you . . .

A: Ignore the chair and have a nice time anyway, or . . .

B: Spend an entire day and several hundred dollars to buy a new easy chair.

Most of us wouldn't spend a lot of time and resources on a chair we couldn't keep, and that's exactly the perspective we should take on the temporary, fickle, destructible things of this world. We can take none of this with us.

So while it's OK to enjoy the life God gave us, we should focus on activities with eternal impact. Nothing can defile His rewards or His children.

c. **We do not worry like others do (vv. 25–34).**

In verse 25, Christ encourages His followers not to be anxious like the Gentiles or pagans. If we do not trust God to take care of us, we will worry about physical needs like our food or clothing. Jesus explains that God cares for His children. Life is more than food or clothing, and if we can trust God to safeguard our eternal souls, we can trust God to take care of our bodies. Anxiety over such things is the fruit of distrust.

This doesn't mean that godly believers will always avoid stress. Stress is the application of pressure in a direction you don't want. As long as we work, serve, and fight, we will feel stress. But when we do feel stress, we can ask God to shoulder it with us. We can trust that His sovereignty, His purpose will give us hope, even in the most difficult times.

Again, if we keep our eyes on our King, we will trust His care. We needn't worry about all the petty, weak dangers around us if we understand how strong and how loving our God is. No matter how poor we may seem here, we are heirs of all the riches of His grace (cf. Eph. 2:4–7).

3. *How we relate to the Judge of the kingdom (7:1–27)*

In this final chapter, Matthew 7, Jesus explains our relationship to God as the Judge of this kingdom. He's not an arbitrary, unfair judge, so how do we know our standing with Him? How will He evaluate us?

a. We judge others only with care (vv. 1–6).

In the first few verses of this chapter, Jesus warns us not to judge others unless we want others to judge us. Anytime we claim knowledge of right and wrong, other people will feel the need to put us to the test. It's easy to find hypocrisy in people, so before we correct someone, we should carefully examine our own life, be honest about our failures, and speak with humility (cf. Gal. 6:1–6).

To be clear, Jesus does not prohibit us from judging. We must in fact discern between right and wrong, good and evil, better and best. And we should try to stop people that drive themselves and others mindlessly toward destruction. But—and this is important—we should never forget our own weakness before God. We're here to help others, not demean them or be harsh with them.

b. We take confidence in God's provision (vv. 7–12).

There's a positive side to God's judgment—He provides for us. When we accept Christ, when God declares us His children, He accepts responsibility for our needs. We can therefore approach Him boldly, confidently, persistently, knowing that our Father will care for us. He will meet our needs not only because He loves us, but also because it is consistent with His character. He is love, so He will show love to us.

And again, once we find security in God's love, we can share love with others. We can follow the Golden Rule—do to others what you'd want them to do to you.

c. We choose Christ as our foundation (vv. 13–27).

Finally, in the latter half of Matthew 7, Jesus uses a handful of images to show the ultimate choice for each person—to follow Christ, or to reject Him. As Christians then, we judge our own steps, our own focus, our own dependencies.

- Why do I value what I value?
- Whose approval do I seek?
- Who do I treat as lord of my life?
- What is the foundation of my faith, my trust?

We do this because we know that one day, God will destroy everything that has no eternal value. If we do not build our lives on Him—on what He says is true, good, excellent—everything we love will crumble. True citizens of God will look forward to His judgment, because we know that at that point, He will somehow make everything *right*—and we'll have the chance to stand with Him.

Christ is our rock, our cornerstone (cf. Eph. 2:19–20), and if we build our lives on His character and His teachings, we are safe and secure.

Conclusion

We can live in this world as citizens of heaven—but only as Christ lives in us and through us. He’s called us to something impossible—to walk perfectly in God’s righteousness—but by His grace we can reflect God to the world. We can be salt and light.

LESSON 2

An Outline of the Sermon

Student Reading

In the coming week, you can prepare for the second teacher’s lesson by reading through the entire Sermon on the Mount. A broad overview will help you better appreciate the individual teachings.

First Reading: Matthew 5

Future passages in this study may be shorter, but for now, read all of Matthew 5 to spot the biggest themes and principles.

- ⦿ We call verses 2–12 the Beatitudes. Who is the only person that could possibly bless us in the ways described here? God
- ⦿ According to verses 10–12, are all persecuted people blessed? Explain your answer. No. Jesus pronounces blessing specifically to those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness—or to those criticized for their relationship to Christ.
- ⦿ Why should believers think and act differently than the rest of the world (v. 16)? To show God’s glory to others

- ⦿ Read verses 17–20 again. Based on your knowledge of the Bible, do you think the principles in this sermon are easier or harder to live than the Old Testament Law? Why? Answers will vary. Students can discuss the distinctions between actions and attitudes, as well as the role of the Spirit in New Testament believers.

- ⦿ If you had to point to a single, core evil that leads to all the sins mentioned in verses 27–42, what would that evil be? What’s the cause of all this wrongdoing? Answers will vary. Perhaps pride, or a turning from God, or a failure to love

- ⦿ Describe the meaning of verses 44–45 in your own words. Answers will vary. We love our enemies to reflect the character of our Father, who offers grace to everyone, even if they don’t accept it.

Second Reading: Matthew 6

In this chapter, Jesus continues to explain how the citizens of His kingdom will act. Note the ways He challenges and encourages His student-followers.

- ⦿ Whose approval should we seek whenever we help others or pray (vv. 4, 6)? Our Father’s

- ⦿ Read verses 7–13 again. What distinguishes a prayer to God from a spell or incantation? Answers will vary. We pray to commune with our Father, not to manipulate or control him. We shouldn’t use prayer to gain approval or admiration from others.

- ◎ How do you think that fasting—from food or from anything else—can help believers today? Answers will vary. Students can discuss the role of fasting in concentrating a believer’s attention. Historically, food preparation took significant time. What other activities today can we temporarily suspend to focus on our relationship with God?

- ◎ Based on your knowledge of the Bible, what do you think “treasure” in heaven is? Answers will vary. Heavenly treasure may include specific rewards, like crowns, or it may be anything of eternal value, like the souls of other believers.

- ◎ In verses 25–34, Jesus argues that we needn’t be anxious over physical needs like food or clothing. Summarize His reasons in your own words:

- Verse 25: Life involves more than physical needs.
- Verses 26, 30: God takes care of plants and animals presumably less worthy than us.

- Verse 27: Anxiety doesn’t accomplish much.

- Verses 32–33: God knows our needs, and as we seek Him, He will provide for us.

- Verse 34: We have enough to deal with today. Tomorrow will worry about itself.

Third Reading: Matthew 7

In this final chapter of the sermon, Jesus emphasizes the importance of our relationship to God the Father.

- ⦿ According to Jesus in verses 1–5, what is the danger of judging others unfairly? Answers will vary. Our judgment opens us up to accusations and may reveal hypocrisy.

- ⦿ Based on your knowledge of the Bible, what good things (v. 11) can we ask from God? Answers will vary. Students can discuss the blessings Jesus described earlier in the sermon, as well as the role of spiritual and physical needs.

- ⦿ Write out the Golden Rule in your own words (v. 12): Text will vary. To reflect the goodness of our Father, we should do to others what we wish they would do to us.

- ⦿ Based on your knowledge of the Bible, what do you think are the signs (v. 20) of a false teacher? Answers will vary. Students can discuss the marks of teachers that distract from the gospel of grace. Consider the descriptions of such teachers in Galatians 4:16–17 and 1 Timothy 4:1–3; 6:3–10.

Read verses 24–27 again and consider how the principles in this sermon can steady your life. How does peace follow wisdom?

Teacher's Lesson

Outline of the Sermon

- A. What citizens of the kingdom **are** _____ (5:3–16)
 - 1. Our heart-attitudes (vv. 3–10)
 - 2. Our purpose in this world (vv. 11–16)
- B. What citizens of the kingdom **do** _____ (5:17–7:27)
 - 1. Our relationship to the Law (5:17–48)
 - a. We fulfill it in **letter** _____ and in **spirit** _____ .
 - b. We follow it to **love others** _____ .
 - 2. The faith behind our devotion (6:1–34)
 - a. We serve and worship to **please God** _____
(vv. 1–18).
 - b. We lay up treasures in our **true kingdom** _____
(vv. 19–24).
 - c. We do not **worry** _____ like others do (vv. 25–34).
 - 3. How we relate to the Judge of the kingdom (7:1–27)
 - a. We judge others only **with care** _____ (vv. 1–6).
 - b. We take confidence in God's **provision** _____
(vv. 7–12).
 - c. We choose Christ as our **foundation** _____
(vv. 13–27).

LESSON 3

The Beatitudes— Portrait of a Christian, Part 1

Primary Text

Matthew 5:3–6

Objectives

- ◉ Outline an interpretative approach to the Beatitudes
- ◉ Define and discuss the first four Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3–6)

Introduction

In the first few lessons of this study, we took a broad look at the context and themes of the Sermon on the Mount. Starting with this lesson, we'll dive into the sermon verse by verse. We've seen the forest, so now we'll take time to appreciate the trees.

Today we'll discuss the Beatitudes—eight very short verses that have had a disproportionate effect on Christianity. These are the diamonds of our faith—tiny, ultra-compressed doctrines cut and polished until they sparkle. They show the heart of a true follower of Christ, a citizen of God's kingdom.

And Jesus pairs with each heart-attitude the hope that inspires us. We can be merciful because God gave us mercy. We can be meek and humble because we know that God will one day establish His kingdom and make every wrong right. The Spirit teaches us these things—He comforts us.

Initial Observations

In his book, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, the commentator Martin Lloyd-Jones offers five general observations to help people understand the Beatitudes.

1. All Christians should be like this.

Every Christian should nurture these attitudes. Christ didn't limit the Beatitudes to clergy, to elites, to so-called super-Christians. The Spirit works in us all. No one's perfect—and if you think you are, you've tripped up on the first Beatitude—but we should all reflect the mind of Christ in whatever way we can.

2. All Christians should manifest all these characteristics.

Again, every one of these attitudes is the responsibility for each believer. Some believers have different talents or skills or gifts, but anyone can embody the Beatitudes. As the Spirit works in us . . .

- We can all be peacemakers.
- We can all endure persecution with grace.
- And we can all mourn over the things that grieve God.

3. None of these refer to natural tendencies.

We shouldn't confuse these attitudes with responses we see in unbelievers. For instance, the "mourning" of verse 4 isn't just plain old regular sadness. Or after looking at verse 9, we might know a few people who resolve conflicts really well. But that doesn't necessarily mean they have the peacemaking heart-attitude you would find in a mature believer. The Beatitudes all require the work of the Holy Spirit, who molds us from the heart outward.

4. These mark the essential differences between Christians and unbelievers.

Few passages of Scripture draw a clearer line between the saved and the lost. Believers can model the Beatitudes if they rely on the Spirit, but unbelievers cannot. Regardless of what unbelievers try to change about themselves or their environment, they simply cannot repair their soul.

- They might show mercy, but they cannot act out of a pure heart of mercy.
- They might be persecuted, but not for righteousness' sake, because Christ hasn't made them righteous before God.

5. Christians and unbelievers belong to two different realms.

Sometimes we can think of our faith and beliefs as something to tack on the rest of our life—as if Christians were simply a different flavor of good people. But Scripture presents us as Spirit-regenerated sinners, renewed from the very core of our being. We are now children of God. We are utterly and essentially different from the way we were before accepting Christ.

This divide applies to our identity, but it also speaks to our fate. As you probably read in Psalm 37, the righteous and the wicked are on two paths. One leads to salvation and an eternal inheritance; the other leads to destruction. In modern Western culture, we may not like such stark distinctions, but Scripture makes clear that to reconnect with God, we need help. Until Christ redeems us, we have no hope of improving ourselves, and God must judge us.

The Beatitudes – Part 1

This lesson will prove difficult not because the material is hard to understand, but because there's so much we could say about each of these verses. If you've been around a church for very long, you may have heard entire sermons on just one of these.

Unfortunately, to keep moving through the Sermon on the Mount, we'll need to explain the Beatitudes quickly. For each verse, we'll review the basic meaning or definition of the heart-attitude, and then we'll discuss the implications and the promised blessing. You'll notice that some of the blessings seem to overlap a bit, but each shines a light on a different facet of God's grace.

I. BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT (V. 3).

A. Definition: humility; a complete absence of self-reliance

In this verse we see the Greek word *ptōchos*, which refers to absolute poverty. Here Jesus evokes the image of a beggar—someone who is hungry, destitute, infirm, who can't help themselves, who depends on the kindness of others to survive. Think of the servant from Matthew 18—on his knees, begging for mercy.

This poverty of spirit is the opposite of pride. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin, shows us how helpless we are before God, and we discover our absolute need for His help.

And that kind of poverty is OK. It's fine to be poor if we have a good patron. We serve the King of Kings, so like Paul, we can describe ourselves as servants of Christ (cf. Rom. 1:1), as adopted heirs of God (cf. Rom. 8:17).

B. Implications

1. *We are incapable of spiritual good, so God must work in us.*

Our own efforts are worthless. We cannot save ourselves, and we cannot improve our condition. Even after we become a Christian, we must depend on God's grace to become more holy. Unfortunately, many Christians look at their spiritual growth as a tag-team effort—Christ saves us, and we take it from there. But no, for salvation and sanctification both, we must continue to depend on God, each and every day.

2. *This heart-attitude is a biblical self-concept.*

Humility should be the default attitude we have toward our self. We fall short of the perfection of Christ. We are fallen, sinful image-bearers of God, and until we realize that, we won't appreciate how He builds us back up.

People caught up in their own pride—with no shame or regret, with no idea of their own failures—will not and cannot ask God for forgiveness. As long as they think they can help themselves, they do not understand salvation.

C. Blessing—Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

1. *We find salvation.*

But when we do go to God for help, He will lift us up out of sin and shame. He grants us entrance to His kingdom, a kingdom reserved for those who know they don't deserve it. Our spiritual poverty prepares us to receive His riches.

2. *We recognize and enjoy Christ's rule in our lives.*

Again, as Christians, we know that we were destitute before Christ, and we are destitute without Him. We therefore submit all our rights and privileges and strength to serve Him. We steward His gifts—that is our responsibility, and that is our joy.

Because this kingdom is in fact a good kingdom. God is a good ruler:

- He makes His expectations clear.
- He offers His love absolutely; He forgives us when we ask.

- He gives us wisdom to use our talents, our gifts, our strengths.
- And He supports us with His Word, His people, and with innumerable other encouragements.

God is not a fickle, exasperating ruler. We can always know where we stand with Him.

II. BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN (V. 4).

A. Definition: Sorrow over sin and its effects

Here Christ offers a blessing to those people who sorrow over sin—over their own sin, over the sin of others, and over all the corruption and destruction they see because of it. Christians do not ignore the pain and suffering of this world—they ache, and they feel a very Christ-like sorrow over people mired and sinking in sin.

B. Implications

1. *We recognize sin as an offense against God.*

If the Spirit does indeed live inside us, we will recognize sin for what it is—an abomination to God and His creation; a perversion of His good work; a turn toward lies and darkness; a betrayal of God’s love for us. Sin is bad first and foremost because it runs counter to God’s holiness and grace.

2. *We regret and condemn sin.*

So we don’t use ignorance, euphemism, or innuendo to make sin seem more attractive. We treat it like diseased garbage. We mourn what sin does in us, and we will mourn what sin does in other people.

Focus—The Sorrow of Christ

In Luke 19, we read that Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem (cf. vv. 41–44). He wept because He offered the people peace, but He knew they’d reject it. He also knew that in less than a generation, the Roman army would raze it to the ground—killing men, women, and children alike. Pride, greed, ignorance, the lust for power—these sins would quite literally tear the city apart. And the godly response to this reality was sorrow.

Whenever we see others in pain, we don’t turn away, brush it off, and explain it away. We let ourselves hurt with them, and then we try to help.

3. *We repent from sin.*

Godly sorrow leads to action. We don't just feel bad about our sin and beat ourselves up—we know that God loves us, and with that love He offers forgiveness (cf. 1 John 1:9). He knew every sin we'd commit and still sent His Son to die for us (cf. Rom. 5:8). He and He alone can cleanse us of this corruption. So Spirit-led sorrow will continue from guilt to repentance—we turn from evil back toward good (cf. 2 Cor. 7:9–10).

4. *We help others overtaken by sin.*

And again, if we truly mourn over sin, we will want to help others taken captive in it. We share the gospel of Christ with them—we show them His love. We encourage and challenge them in the best way we can (cf. Gal. 6:1–4).

C. Blessing—They will be comforted.

As long as we live in this sin-cursed world, we will feel some sorrow. But God promises to comfort us. His graces are innumerable, but we'll list three that give us hope in the present.

1. *The comfort of salvation and assurance*

God saves us, and His Spirit continues to assure us of His work. Anytime we think of our sin, we can immediately remind ourselves that God has conferred upon us the righteousness of Christ.

2. *The comfort of forgiveness and security*

And God continues to forgive us. We will continue to fail, but we can continue to seek His grace. Nothing can separate us from Him.

3. *The comfort of eternity and glorification*

One day, sin will wither, die, and become a memory. In heaven, God will glorify us, and we will become perfect and entire, the people He meant us to be. He'll wipe away every tear, and the hope of that day should provide some comfort now.

III. BLESSED ARE THE MEEK (V. 5).

A. Definition: Recognizing our position, we submit ourselves to God.

As we understand where we are and what God has done for us, we choose to turn from selfishness and give everything up to God—our will, our strength, our future, our wealth, our desires, *everything*. We bend all our rights and privileges toward His good purpose. We nurture this meekness, this submissiveness, when we study how great God is and how we can join His work. We can't possibly manage God's kingdom—we can't even manage ourselves—so we submit to His rule.

B. Implications

1. *We choose a better Master.*

All of humanity serves *something*. People serve rulers, or ideologies, or their spouses, or their children, or the pursuit of riches and fame, or feelings of security and belonging, or any number of personal desires. Some of these longings and desires are good, but all become evil when they draw our attention away from our Father.

When we choose our master, we should choose wisely. Desires change. Happiness evades us. Security falls apart. Beauty fades. Wealth doesn't satisfy. People fail us or leave us. Ideologies lose touch with reality. Anytime we construct a god apart from our heavenly Father, we sin—and sin is a cruel, fickle, unsatisfiable master.

2. *We desire God's control and direction.*

As we see more of God's work, we'll seek out His control and direction. As we noted before, He rules His kingdom well, and we'll find joy and peace following the law of His love. If we walk with His Spirit, we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). If we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, He will provide for our needs (Matt. 6:33).

3. *We do not fight for our own sake.*

Christians serve a purpose higher than their own wants—we represent an eternal kingdom protected by an all-powerful Ruler. We can act with confidence, so we aren't as concerned when people try to hurt us, insult us, or strip us of our rights. We have the security and assurance to turn the other cheek (cf. Matt. 5:39). With this kind of meekness, we can brush off the small

offenses, the petty arguments, the little distractions. And no matter the hurt we've felt, we can always respond with love.

Context—Pursuing Justice

Yes, we seek justice, but we let God fight for us. When Christians seek power, influence, or fame just to make themselves more comfortable or respected, they often betray a lack of trust in God. We should pursue good for our communities and our culture, but we should never water down or distort the gospel just to gain worldly power.

C. Blessing—They will inherit the earth.

1. We remain content in the present.

As we give everything to God, we also give up responsibility to worry and fret over our lives. Since God claims control of us, He's responsible for taking care of our needs. And since He loves us, He'll also provide much more that we can cherish and enjoy.

2. We find hope in our unmatched promise.

God asks everything from us now, but He'll provide everything worthwhile in the future. Some day, the meek will inherit the new heaven and earth without so much as lifting a finger. Like our salvation and sanctification, the world will come to us as a gift of our Father. He will ask us to judge, to rule, to explore, and to enjoy all of this for all eternity (cf. Luke 19:13–27; Rom. 8:16–17; 1 Cor. 6:2–3; Rev. 22:1–5).

IV. BLESSED ARE THEY THAT HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS (V. 6).

A. Definition: a desire to be right with God and free from sin

Once we recognize the wickedness and worthlessness of sin, we will desire the righteousness of God. We will want to align ourselves with His desires, His character, and His work. We will want to join His plan and put off anything that might distract us. As we lose our appetite for sin, we'll hunger for something better.

B. Implications

1. *We need the righteousness of God.*

Christ's use of this imagery makes one principle pretty clear. We experience hunger and thirst whenever our body decides that it needs food. Likewise, we need to be right with God. So as the Spirit restores of the image of God in us, we will want to have a good, strong, close relationship with our Father.

a. **Hunger and thirst are intense.**

This desire may at times be severe. Christians that stray from the Father will realize over time—as the Spirit works—that something is missing in their life. They may try to mask that pain, that conviction, but if they truly are God's children, they will not find satisfaction in anything except the righteousness of God.

b. **Hunger and thirst recur.**

We could infer another principle from this picture—our desire for righteousness keeps coming back. We want continual growth and ongoing communion with God. He satisfies us, but He always has more to offer.

Context—David's Thirst

This principle reflects the psalmist's thirst in Psalm 42:1–3—or David's thirst in Psalm 63:1–4. David pictures God as a spring of water in a dry, barren land.

2. *We reject happiness as a goal.*

Much of the world pursues happiness for its own sake. But Christians understand that true joy arises from the work of the Spirit as we follow Christ. We discover moments of happiness on the road toward our true purpose. Good feelings may arise when we accomplish good work for a good purpose in a good way at a good time.

But if we pursue those good feelings for their own sake, we'll take shortcuts. We'll try to grab at something good in a sinful way—or before we're ready, or for selfish purposes.

Context—Happiness and Joy

Happiness is a superficial emotion that comes and goes with our circumstances. *Joy* is an uplifted attitude of hope and peace that prevails through good times and bad.

A Christian can be joyful, yet face sorrow and heartbreak. Likewise, someone can be happy without knowing true joy.

C. Blessing—They will be filled.

When we want what God wants, we won't be disappointed. Yes, we'll be frustrated with sin and its effects, and yes, we must wait to see God fully glorified before all people. But God promises those of us who hunger after righteousness will ultimately receive satisfaction.

1. *God satisfies those who seek Him.*

Again, as you read in Psalm 37—if you delight in God, He will give you the desires of your heart (v. 4). Matthew 6:33 takes this further—if we seek His kingdom and righteousness first, all our other needs will be provided, as well.

2. *God is the one who accomplishes this work.*

We should note that English translations render this phrase as “be filled” or “be satisfied,” but this is not a passive verb in the Greek. God does the filling here. He backs up this promise personally—we're not left to find satisfaction on our own.

Within broader Christian doctrine, we could apply this image in at least three ways:

a. **At the point of salvation, God fills us with positional righteousness.**

When we accepted Christ as our Savior, He changed our standing with God.

b. **Today, God continues to sanctify us through Christ's righteousness.**

We have the righteousness of Christ in us. As we walk with the Spirit, we become more holy—more set apart and complete for Him.

c. **One day, God will glorify us in perfect righteousness.**

In heaven, we will be the perfect reflection of Christ's righteousness.

Conclusion

In the next lesson, we'll discuss the final four Beatitudes. In the meantime, however, take some time to re-read this passage and the others in your student manual. When you read that the meek will inherit this world, accept it on faith. Trust that God bends His universe toward our good—a good you don't have to scratch and fight to secure. Trust Him, and if you fight, fight to reach others with His love.

These attitudes should shine through each of us, and the rest of the sermon will help us understand how.

LESSON 3

The Beatitudes— Portrait of a Christian, Part 1

Student Reading

First Reading: Matthew 18:21–25

In this passage, Jesus shares the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. Consider the story and answer the questions below.

- ⦿ What kind of answer do you think Peter wanted from Jesus (v. 21)? Answers will vary. Peter likely wanted a simple rule or standard that would allow him to appear merciful without offering mercy all the time.

- ⦿ What was the consequence of the servant's unpaid debt (v. 25)? The king ordered the servant's property and family all be sold to repay at least part of the debt.

- ⦿ How did the servant avoid this consequence (vv. 26–27)? He begged the king for forgiveness, and the king canceled his debt out of pity.

- ⦿ When the servant demanded a much smaller debt from another servant, what did that debtor do (v. 29)? He fell to his knees and begged, just like the first servant did before the king.

- ⦿ In your opinion, was the king's anger justified (vv. 32–34)? Why or why not? Answers will vary. The first servant could have lost everything—including his family—but he was not so grateful to extend mercy over a much smaller debt. Instead, he treated his fellow servant cruelly for no reason. What good is it to free one servant if he'll simply attack another?

- ⦿ Describe the relationship between our gratitude and mercy. Answers will vary. As we nurture gratitude toward God, we will allow grace to cover the small offenses of our brothers and sisters. We will pursue justice only with a mind toward restoration. We have no standing to condemn others.

Second Reading: Isaiah 40

In this passage, after thirty-nine chapters of warnings and judgment, the prophet Isaiah reminds the people of Israel that their God is supreme. He offers them hope by promising a future Savior and an eternal kingdom.

- ⦿ Why are people not a good foundation for our hope (vv. 6–8)? Isaiah compares people to grass that fades and blows away, while God's Word endures forever.

- ⦿ How does God treat His children (vv. 10–11)? Like a shepherd, He is powerful, but He treats us with gentleness—especially those that need extra care.

- Why would Isaiah use a terrifying description of God to comfort the people (vv. 12–26)? Answers will vary. If God is powerful, and He loves us, He can and will protect us. The mightiest forces on Earth cannot stand against Him. If He can control the destiny of the stars, He can provide for us.

- What promise does Isaiah offer those who place their hope in God (vv. 28–31)? What do you think this gift means? Answers will vary. God will give us strength, and He will uphold us. He will work through us—that is, He will enable us to do whatever He calls us to do.

- What attribute or characteristic of God have you found the most comforting? Answers will vary. Students can discuss God’s knowledge, power, care, eternity, or other hope-giving attributes.

Third Reading: Psalm 37

In this psalm, David contrasts the fate of wicked people and the fate of the righteous.

- What shouldn’t worry or frustrate us (vv. 1–2)? Evil people; wrong doers
- What attitudes does David contrast with worry or frustration (vv. 3–4, 7)? Trust; gratitude, delight; patience

- ⦿ What does God promise repeatedly to those who are peaceful, who place their hope in Him (vv. 9, 11, 22, 29, 34)? They will inherit the land/earth. They will enjoy peace.

- ⦿ What big difference does David point out between the wicked and the righteous in verses 14, 16, 21, 25–26? The wicked may be rich, but they exploit and abuse the poor. The righteous are generous with whatever little they have.

- ⦿ Where do the righteous keep the law of their God (v. 31)?
In their hearts

- ⦿ What image does David use to describe God in verses 39–40?
A stronghold; a refuge

Preview

Before your next class time, briefly read Matthew 5:3–10 and consider the following questions:

- ⦿ What do you think “poor in spirit” means (v. 3)?
- ⦿ Do you think verse 5 includes roughly the same promise as you read in Psalm 37, or does Jesus mean something more?

Teacher's Lesson

Initial Observations

In *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, Martin Lloyd-Jones offers five general observations on the Beatitudes. These are summarized below:

1. **All** _____ Christians should be like this.
2. All Christians should manifest **all** _____ these characteristics.
3. None of these refer to **natural** _____ tendencies.
4. These mark the **essential** _____ differences between Christians and unbelievers.
5. Christians and unbelievers belong to **two different** _____ realms.

I. Blessed are the poor in spirit (v. 3).

- A. Definition: **humility** _____; a complete absence of self-reliance
- B. Implications
 1. We are incapable of spiritual good, so **God** _____ must work in us.
 2. This heart-attitude is a biblical **self-concept** _____.
- C. Blessing—Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 1. We find **salvation** _____.
 2. We recognize and enjoy Christ's **rule** _____ in our lives.

II. Blessed are they that mourn (v. 4).

- A. Definition: **Sorrow** _____ over sin and its effects

B. Implications

1. We recognize sin as **an offense against God**_____.
2. We regret and condemn sin.
3. We **repent**_____ from sin.
4. We **help**_____ others overtaken by sin.

C. Blessing—They will be comforted.

1. The comfort of salvation and assurance
2. The comfort of forgiveness and security
3. The comfort of eternity and glorification

III. Blessed are the meek (v. 5).

A. Definition: Recognizing our position, we **submit**_____ ourselves to God.

B. Implications

1. We choose a better **Master**_____.
2. We desire God's **control and direction**_____.
3. We do not **fight**_____ for our own sake.

C. Blessing—They will inherit the earth.

1. We remain **content**_____ in the present.
2. We find hope in our unmatched **promise**_____.

IV. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness (v. 6).

A. Definition: a desire to be **right**_____ with God and **free**_____ from sin

B. Implications

1. We need the righteousness of God.
 - a. Hunger and thirst are **intense**_____.
 - b. Hunger and thirst **recur**_____.
2. We reject **happiness**_____ as a goal.

C. Blessing—They will be filled.

1. God satisfies those who **seek**_____ Him.
2. God is the one who accomplishes this work.
 - a. At the point of salvation, God fills us with **positional**_____ righteousness.
 - b. Today, God continues to **sanctify**_____ us through Christ's righteousness.
 - c. One day, God will **glorify**_____ us in perfect righteousness.