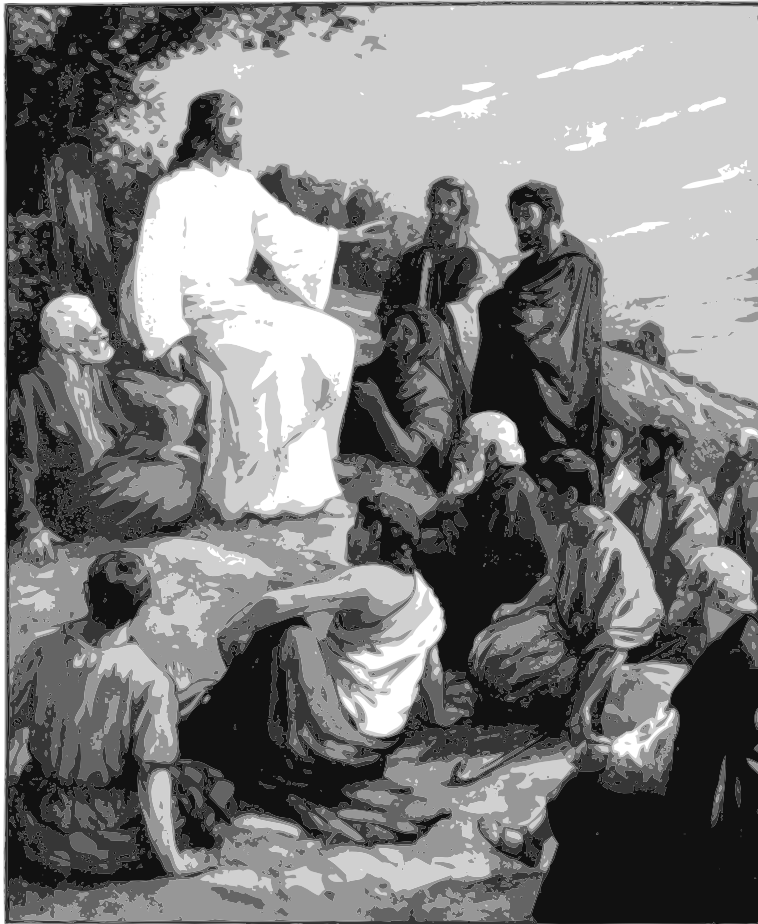


THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT



Living Other-worldly

Matthew 5-7

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PREFACE

THIS BIBLE STUDY OF CHRIST'S SERMON ON THE MOUNT originated as my prepared notes for teaching our local ABF (Adult Bible Fellowship) class on Sunday mornings. As with the other resources at our web site, we make it available to others simply because it already exists. I make no claim to scholarship, special insight, or extraordinary understanding of God's holy word. I have been called in the local assembly to teach (predominantly) senior adults from God's word. Following the example of the early churches, those of us in the kingdom are encouraged to "[share our possessions] with all, as anyone might have need." (Acts 2:45) If others can benefit from this study, then all the better. The notes have been formatted to:

- make them easy for on-screen use—including on newer media platforms; and
- include complete Scripture passages on the same page, so the user is not required to have his or her Bible alongside.

This is not to say that we *discourage* the accompaniment of God's printed word, but that we wanted to make the notes as accessible and portable as possible.

As with all of our resources, we offer this free of charge, to the glory of God the Father, and the praise of Jesus Christ our Lord.

David S. Lampel
Winterset, Iowa
April 2012

EXPLANATIONS

SCRIPTURE VERSIONS

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Greek and Hebrew citations are from *Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary*, and the *NASB Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*.

NET Bible, © 1996-2005 Biblical Studies Press

ABBREVIATIONS

NASB: *New American Standard Bible*

NKJV: *New King James Version*

KJV: *King James Version*

KJVS: Both *King James Version* and *New King James Version*

NIV: *New International Version*

RSV: *Revised Standard Version*

YLT: *Young's Literal Translation*

ESV: *English Standard Version*

OT, NT: *Old Testament, New Testament*

STANDARD CITATIONS

Barnes: Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Bible*.

Boice: James Montgomery Boice, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gæbelein, General Editor. Copyright © 1976, Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Brown: Brown's *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*; Colin Brown, General Editor; English Language edition copyright © 1975, 1986, The Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and The Paternoster Press, Ltd. Exeter, Devon, U.K.

Carson: D. A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gæbelein, General Editor. Copyright © 1976, Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Clarke: *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*.

Darby: John Nelson Darby, *Synopsis of the Old and New Testaments*.

Grudem: Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*.

Henry: *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*.

JFB: *Commentary on the Old and New Testaments* by Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown.

Lightfoot: John Lightfoot, English Biblical critic and Hebraist (1602-1675).

Swindoll: Charles R. Swindoll, Pastor, Radio teacher and chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary.

Vincent: Marvin R. Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies*.

Vine's: W. E. Vine, *The Expanded Vine's: Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*.

Matthew 4:23-5:2

Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan. When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying,

Matthew 7:28-29

When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

There are times when we can only marvel at this book in our hands—especially its ability to paint a picture, to set a scene for us. My favorite is in the book of Nehemiah, that powerful moment when, after seventy years in exile, after returning to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem’s protective walls, the Jews gather to hear Ezra the priest and scribe read the law. In the book of Nehemiah, chapter eight, we read...

And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who *could* listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose... [He] opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the Lord the great God. And all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with *their* faces to the ground. ...the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people *remained* in their place. They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading. (from Nehemiah 8:1-8)

In the gospel of Matthew (with a shorter version in the gospel of Luke) we have a similar scene—only this time the person standing before the crowd is not a priest or scribe, but very Son of God. And He is not reading from an ancient text, but speaking the truth of God from God’s mind. In point of fact, He *is* God, speaking *His* mind.

Read Matthew 4:23 to 5:2.

Just imagine what that was like, sitting there under the teaching of Christ Jesus Himself. Of course not one of them understood the fullness of who He was or why He came, but most knew that He spoke as no one had before.

Read Matthew 7:28-29.

TIME AND PLACE

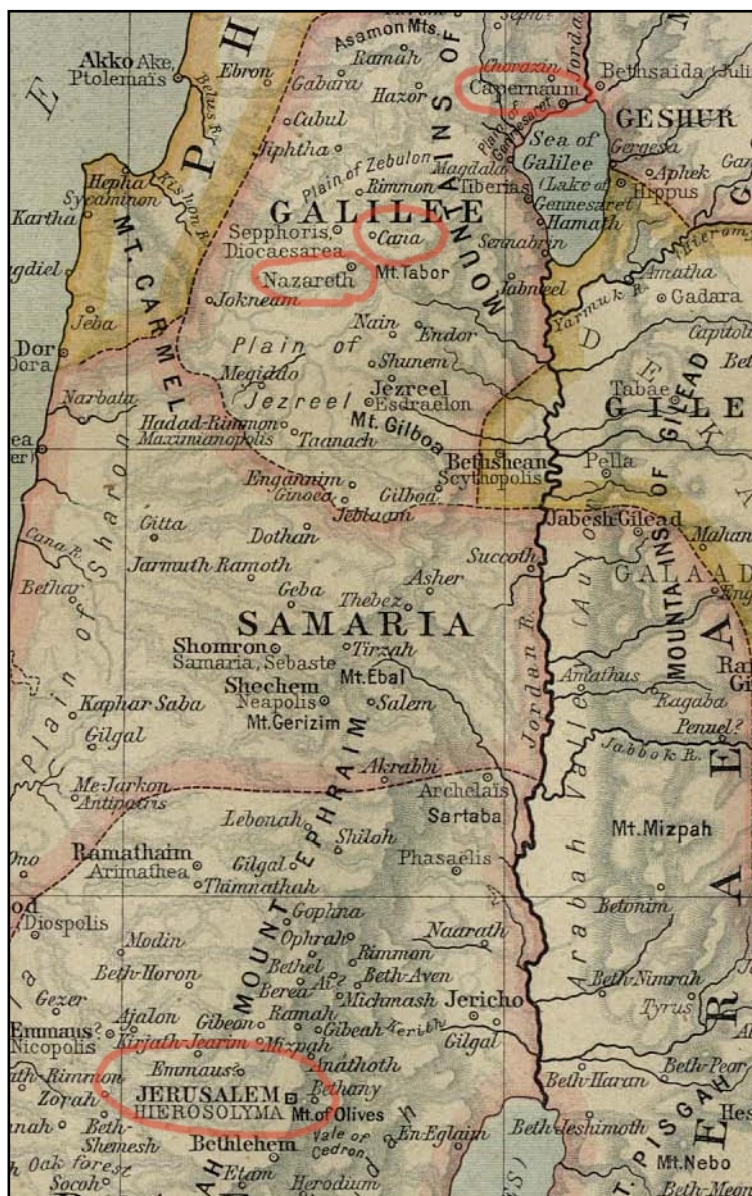
Time: During Christ’s first year of ministry

Rough Timeline (Matthew):

- Baptized by John
- Temptation in the wilderness
- Begins gathering Disciples
- Crowds are swelling
- Delivers Sermon on the Mount

(Refer to a map in the back of your Bible, or the map on the next page.)

Place: probably one of the foothills around the N Galilean plain (about 80 miles from Jerusalem), perhaps near Capernaum (on the upper, NW shore of the Sea of Galilee).
Note close proximity to Cana (site of first recorded miracle).



Historical Atlas by William R. Shepherd, 1923/1926.

There is no contradiction necessary between Matthew's "mountain" or "hill" (5:1) and Luke's "level place" or "plain" (6:17), which could have been on the side of a hill.

Now, the geographical setting of this discourse is not terribly important to our study, but (as is often the case) I was intrigued by something Charles Haddon Spurgeon said in a sermon of his in the year 1873:

Spurgeon: Whether or no the chosen mount was that, which is now known as the Horns of Hattim, is not a point which it falls in our way to contest; that he ascended an elevation is enough for our purpose. Of course, this would be mainly because of the accommodation which the open hill-side would afford to the people, and the readiness with which, upon some jutting crag, the preacher might sit down, and be both heard and seen; but we believe the chosen place of meeting had also its instruction. Exalted doctrine might well be symbolised by an ascent to the mount; at any rate, let every minister feel that he should ascend in spirit when he is about to descant upon the lofty themes of the gospel. A doctrine which could not be hid, and which

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Acts 8:34-35

The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

Matthew 5:20

"For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

Matthew 5:21-22

"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

Matthew 5:27-28

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Matthew 5:43-44

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,"

Matthew 5:48

"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Matthew 6:14-15

"For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."

Matthew 7:12

"In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

would produce a Church comparable to a city set on a hill, fitly began to be proclaimed from a conspicuous place. A crypt or cavern would have been out of all character for a message which is to be published upon the housetops, and preached to every creature under heaven.

AUDIENCE

Not a public discourse intended for a large crowd, but directed toward His immediate disciples and followers and *witnessed* by the larger crowd. (cf. Matt. 5:1 & Luke 6:20)

OPENING HIS MOUTH

opening His mouth = used in solemn or revelatory contexts [cf., Acts 8:34-35, 10:34. also Job 3:1, 33:2, Daniel 10:16]

IT'S ESSENCE

It can be a fascinating study to consider all the opinions put forth by the many commentators about the place, time and structure of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. For example, Does it represent one cohesive discourse, or did Matthew compile the material from several?

Our purpose here is not to debate authenticity. I propose to take a clean, uncluttered approach to this: Nothing else really matters; Jesus said it, so we need to learn and understand it. Period.

But how are we to approach this Sermon? Is it a new "law"? Is it Jesus' new version of the Ten Commandments? In other words, *must* we obey this teaching to please God? For example,

Read selected verses, 5:20, 21-22, 27-28, 43-44, 48; 6:14-15; 7:12.

Our goal must always be to see as God sees, to live as Christ lived, and to obey what Christ teaches. The Christian must always make a concerted effort—not for salvation, but for righteousness and obedience—to live beyond the standards of this world.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is all about Kingdom living—or *living other-worldly*. To many, the counsel to live 'other-worldly' sounds as if they are being told to live outside reality—to live with their head in the clouds, to be perpetual navel-gazers. To spend our days floating about the ether, our feet never coming to rest on solid ground. But living according to the eternal kingdom-world places our feet on a foundation much more solid than anything manufactured by this world. There is no greater reality than the reality of Christ's kingdom. As Jesus himself points out near the end of His sermon.

Matthew 7:24-25

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock."

If the standards put forth by Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount seem to us too harsh, too strident, too difficult to accomplish, it is only because our standards have become so base. It is only when we interpret His teaching through the eyes and heart of *this* world that it seems so unmanageable. Yet when we interpret it through the eyes and heart of the living God, Christ's teaching seems perfectly normal.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

1 Corinthians 1:18

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Living other-worldly means that

- while our feet may be planted on this temporal plane, our heart and soul reside with the Lord.
- while our body is fed by this world's food, our spirit is fed from above.
- when we are forced to choose between kingdoms, we choose the only one that will last forever.

In this age it can be difficult at times to grasp the reality of such things. They sound hazy, ephemeral—like trying to describe last night's dream. They seem to have no basis in fact for a world constructed on the foundation of logic and reason.

The truth of the matter is that it is precisely *this* age that is on shaky ground—even though to those outside the kingdom, it seems the other way around.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18.

Christ's sermon—we use the familiar term, but it is better called a *discourse*—has nothing to do with salvation, but everything to do with the ethics of a saved life. It has nothing to do with *becoming* a Christian, but everything to do with *being* a Christian.

Christ's Sermon answers for the believer questions such as,

How shall I live? How *should* I live?

What sort of life pleases God and His Son?

How is my life to look to others?

Matthew Henry: It is the longest and fullest continued discourse of our Saviour that we have upon record in all the gospels. It is a practical discourse; there is not much of the credenda of Christianity in it—the things to be believed, but it is wholly taken up with the agenda—the things to be done.

But we should note that

Donald Guthrie: Jesus declined to assess a person's character by what he did without reference to his inner motives. For Jesus ethics was fundamentally a matter of a person's *character* rather than of his activity. What he *is*, is more important than what he *does*, for his character will determine his actions.

Further,

No ethic can be imposed on an obstinate will. Jesus expected a full surrender of self to the perfect will of God [as He did in Himself], which means that the human will becomes exposed to an influence for good which otherwise would not exist. This cannot happen except by individual willingness to surrender. (from his *New Testament Theology*.)

Thus, as with worship, the ethics of Christianity are only sound if they emanate from the heart. Jesus Himself speaks of actions, behavior, but assumes the behavior is generated from a surrendered, sincere heart—a heart moved by the Holy Spirit out of a devotion to Christ and Father God.

Thus the Sermon on the Mount is not "Christianity's message to the pagan world." It cannot be considered "good news" (the gospel) to anyone depending on fulfillment of its demands for entrance into the kingdom. (Just imagine someone outside of Christ, without the indwelling Spirit, trying to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees! [Matt. 5:20]) The Sermon on the Mount is rather a character sketch of those who have already entered the kingdom and a description of the quality of ethical life now expected of them. (Source: *Bible Dictionary*)

SURVEY

Let's take just a few minutes to conduct a brief survey of Christ's sermon.

1. Beatitudes – Matthew 5:1-12
Jesus sets the tone of the whole discourse with His bullet points of blessedness. The beatitudes, as well as the entire sermon are all about Kingdom living.
2. Witness – 5:13-16
Jesus speaks about the importance of our witness and example to the world.
3. The Law and the Prophets – 5:17-20
The relationship of Christ and His teaching to the Mosaic Law and earlier writings of the OT prophets.
4. Our Relationships with Others – 5:21-26
Here Jesus really begins to specify how different Kingdom living really is from earth-living. Here He begins to show what living other-worldly really looks like.
5. Going Beyond the Letter -5:27-48
In this passage Jesus compares the requirements of the Mosaic law—which He presents as minimal—to the ethics of the Christian life.
 - a. Adultery: 27-30
 - b. Divorce: 31-32
 - c. Vows: 33-37
 - d. Response: 38-42
 - e. Love & Hate: 43-48
6. A Good Show (Hypocrisy) – 6:1-15
In the first half of Chapter 6, Jesus compares the hypocritical behavior of the religious leaders to the more earnest, humble behavior honored by our heavenly Father.
 - a. Giving – 6:1-2
 - b. Prayer – 6:5,7-8
 - c. Fasting – 6:16
7. The Kingdom Way – 6:1-15
 - a. Giving – 6:3-4
 - b. Prayer – 6:8-11,13
 - c. Prayer & Forgiveness – 6:12,14-15
 - d. Fasting – 6:17-18

<i>Matthew 6:1-15</i>	<i>A Good Show</i>	<i>The Kingdom Way</i>
Giving	1-2	3-4
Prayer	5,7-8	8-11,13
Prayer & Forgiveness		12,14-15
Fasting	16	17-18

8. Treasure – 6:19-21
From v19 of Chapter 6 through v7 of Chapter 7 Jesus counsels specifics about such things as our priorities and loyalties; our faith and trust in a loving, caring God; how we are to address our own failings before we try to do the same in others; and the earnestness of our prayer life.
9. Light & Darkness/God & Mammon – 6:22-24
10. Anxiety - 6:25-34
11. Judging Others – 7:1-5
12. Pearls before Swine – 7:6
13. Prayer – 7:7-11
14. Fair Treatment – 7:12
15. The Narrow Way – 7:13-14
He begins His wrap-up in v13 of Chapter 7, describing the fruit that will be produced in a life headed down the “narrow” way. And His sermon climaxes with His parable about the contrast between those who build on a foundation of shifting sand and those who build on the solid foundation of the rock.
16. Our Discernment – 7:15-20
17. God’s Discernment – 7:21-23
18. Choosing our Foundation – 7:24-27
19. Amazing Teaching – 7:28

Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Psalms 1:1

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

Psalms 2:12

Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

Psalms 32:1-2

How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit!

Luke 1:45

"And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."

Matthew 5:1-6

[Note: For a more in-depth study of "The Beatitudes," see our separate study of the same name.]

Read Matthew 5:1-12.

ON THE WORD "BEATITUDES"

This word is not Biblical, but from the French *beatitude*, derived from the Latin *beatitudo*, which is from the root *beatus*, meaning "perfect blessedness or happiness."

ON THE WORD "BLESSED"

makarios = a prolonged form of the poetical *makar* (meaning the same); **supremely blest**; by extension **fortunate**, well off :- blessed, happy (× -ier). Here, emphatic.

Original secular Greek: "free from daily cares and worries. ...the condition of the gods and those who share their happy existence." But then degenerated into just "happy."

Philo (the Jew; of Alexandria): Only the deity attains to blessedness; He alone is blessed. Men share in this only in so far as the divine nature penetrates the creation.

As with *Philo*, the source of true blessedness is God Himself—true *joy*, as superior to mere happiness.

"Blessed... refers to the distinctive religious joy which accrues to man from his share in the Kingdom of God." (Reflected even in the dictionary, which states as its first definition, "holy; sacred; consecrated.")

Blessedness describes those...

- whose path in life remains near to God's path: Read Psalms 1:1.
- who place their trust in God: Read Psalms 2:12.
- whose sin is forgiven: Read Psalms 32:1-2.
- who believe what God has promised: Read Luke 1:45.

V3

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

There are at least three ways we could interpret this phrase "spiritually poor":

1. a *dearth* of spirit; *devoid* of spirituality

We are all born into this world "spiritually poor." We are born in abject spiritual poverty, with our "God space" empty. This describes the world that does not know Christ—the world outside the Kingdom.

But this verse is not speaking of that; if it were, there would be no distinction—and there would be no "blessed."

2. someone in whom there is indeed the Spirit, but He remains un-nurtured, neglected; these are people who are spiritually malnourished—and don't care. Again, they would not fit the definition of "blessed".

3. These first two are not what is being said here. Jesus speaks instead of believers who *know they are spiritually poor in and of themselves alone*.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Luke 18:9-14

And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

"But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'

"I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Mark 16:9-11

[Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it.

Albert Barnes: "To be poor in spirit is to have a humble opinion of ourselves; to be sensible that we are sinners, and have no righteousness of our own; to be willing to be saved only by the rich grace and mercy of God; to be willing to be where God places us, to bear what he lays on us, to go where he bids us, and to die when he commands; to be willing to be in his hands, and to feel that we deserve no favor from him."

Charles Swindoll: one who is "not spiritually self-sufficient; one who has learned to lean; one who knows his or her own limitations; an absence of arrogance and pride... Those who are poor in Spirit don't drop names; those who are poor in Spirit don't feel the need to impress you with where they've traveled, how many degrees they've earned, or who they know."

John Gill (more succinctly): "...being sensible of their poverty, they place themselves at the door of mercy, and knock there."

Jesus says that those who are truly blessed are the ones who have acknowledged the emptiness inside their souls, and that it is a space Christ alone is able to fill.

AN ILLUSTRATION

Read Luke 18:9-14.

v4

**BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN,
FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED.**

mourn = to grieve, lament (the feeling or the act); general sorrow.

In **secular Greek**, used for the external signs of mourning for the dead. In the **OT** mostly connotes the act of mourning over realized or impending misfortune. In the **NT**, used to express sorrow over the absence of a loved one, or for those who mourned the death of Christ:

AN ILLUSTRATION

Read Mark 16:9-11.

[Just like when Peter was released from jail in Acts 12 (punch line: vs13-16).]

To put this into a contemporary context, this word would describe our reaction to the loss of a great leader, or a husband or wife. Or something more personal.

- Jesus says, "Blessed are you who mourn over a marriage that didn't survive, over a wayward child who is spurning the way of righteousness, over a mate who does not yet know the Lord."
- He says, "Blessed are you who mourn over society's depravity, over a system that is purposely removing God from every part of public life."
- And, "Blessed are you who mourn those who have fallen, those who have given their lives in defense of the good, the right, those who have paid a heavy price to protect liberty and justice."

And let's remember what "blessed" means: those who mourn will know a distinctive, sacred joy—a peace and joy born only in heaven.

comforted = *parakaleō* = **to call near, i.e. invite**, invoke (by imploration, hortation or consolation) :- beseech, call for, (be of good) comfort, desire, (give) **exhort** (-ation), **entreat**, **pray**; **encourage**.

The Message: "You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you."

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Daniel 7:18

'But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come.'

Daniel 7:27

'Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.'

v5

BLESSED ARE THE GENTLE, FOR THEY SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH.

gentle^{NASB}, **meek**^{KJVS, NIV} = *praus* = **mild**, i.e. (by implication) **humble** :- meek. See also <G4235> (*praios*); *praios* = a form of <G4239> (*prau's*), used in certain parts; **gentle**, i.e. humble :- meek

Swindoll: " 'Gentle' is strength under control. It is used of a stallion that's been broken: still strong, all the muscle structure still in that body, but under control. With a pull of the reins that horse obeys."

The Beatitudes—and the Sermon as a whole—do not represent moral virtues—that is, disciplines of the flesh—but Christian graces that are produced, first, as a result of the indwelling Spirit, and second, as a result of walking in communion with God. We do not gain Christ by behaving according to these precepts, rather we behave this way by accepting Christ as Lord, and walking with Him.

We do not walk humbly, gently through an act of sheer will, but through the power of God working in our lives.

Vs 3 & 5—possessing the kingdom of heaven and inheriting the earth—take on fresh meaning after our recent study of *The Beginning of Heaven*. For me these phrases used to be a bit vaporous, cloudy concepts soaked in church talk. But now they mean something more tangible. The blessed of God need not wait for some future realization of a promise; because they are already in their eternity present, they already possess heaven. And their inheritance is already set in place—their eternity future will include their responsibilities as rulers and priests on a new earth.

Read Daniel 7:18 & 27.

And John in Revelation 5:9-10 gives us the lyrics of a new song sung in heaven:

And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

v6

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEY SHALL BE SATISFIED.

hunger = *peinaō* = from the same as <G3993> (*penes*) ↓ (through the idea of pinching toil; "pine"); to famish (absolute or comparatively); figurative to crave :- be an hungered.

penēs (G3993) = from a primary **peno** (to *toil* for daily subsistence); *starving*, i.e. *indigent* :- poor.

thirst = *dipsaō* = to thirst

Even in early, secular Greek these words were not restricted to man's physical needs, but extended to the intellectual and spiritual life. They express a passionate longing for something without which one cannot live, e.g., freedom, honor, fame, wealth, praise, enlightenment. This desire is often emphasized by bracketing hunger and thirst together. (Brown) [21 times in Scripture]

righteousness = *dikaïosynē* = equity (of character or act); specially (Christian) **justification** (from G1342) ↓

dikaïos = from <G1349> (dike); equitable (in character or act); by implication **innocent, holy** (absolute or relative) :- just, meet, right (-eous).

satisfied^{NASB}, **filled**^{KJVS, NIV} = from <G5528> (*chortos*); **to fodder, i.e.** (genitive) **to gorge (supply food in abundance)** :- feed, fill, satisfy; fatten.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Psalms 27:1-14

The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear?
 The Lord is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread? When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh, My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell.
 Though a host encamp against me, My heart will not fear; Though war arise against me, In spite of this I shall be confident. One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the Lord And to meditate in His temple. For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; In the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me up on a rock. And now my head will be lifted up above my enemies around me, And I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the Lord. Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice, And be gracious to me and answer me. When You said, "Seek My face," my heart said to You, "Your face, O Lord, I shall seek." Do not hide Your face from me, Do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my help; Do not abandon me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation! For my father and my mother have forsaken me, But the Lord will take me up. Teach me Your way, O Lord, And lead me in a level path Because of my foes. Do not deliver me over to the desire of my adversaries, For false witnesses have risen against me, And such as breathe out violence. I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord In the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the Lord.

I think I prefer the imagery of the kjvs here. It really is a word picture of eating, of being filled up, replete, with whatever it is you are consuming.

The righteous man in ancient Greece (*dikaïos*) was originally one whose behavior fit into the framework of his society and who fulfilled his rightful obligations towards the gods and his fellow men, his observance of such obligations serving to differentiate him from the unrighteous. (Brown)

The individual who is righteous *in Christ* is thus one whose behavior fits into the framework of *God's* society.

It is important to differentiate Jesus' "hunger and thirst for righteousness" from that which was common under the law: The Pharisee, the Jewish legalist (and, perhaps the modern legalist?) whose prayer might be, "I want to be righteous," while the prayer of the hungering penitent might be, "I want *Your* righteousness in my life, O God."

Remember the contrast between the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18: The Pharisee's purpose was to *appear* righteous, to think himself better than everyone else, while the tax collector wanted only to confess his spiritual bankruptcy and plead for the righteousness of God through His grace.

AN ILLUSTRATION

Read Psalm 27.

This is the prayer of someone who hungers and thirsts for righteousness.

(this session continued on next page)

YOUR NOTES OR THOUGHTS

Permit me to close this session by reading a letter to God

Dear God,

Few things in this world are as dependable as the flurry of activity at the bird feeder when it snows. No matter the time of year, a fresh batch of seed will always attract some takers, and there seems to be a direct relationship between falling temperatures and rising interest in a handout. But like polite visitors during the first few minutes of a party, the birds are few in number and peck tentatively at the source of their nourishment.

Let a few snowflakes fall from the sky, however, and quickly the area around the feeder becomes a Convention of the Winged. All good manners are tossed aside as the feeding frenzy begins. It's as if the snow reminds Your feathered creations that they are, indeed, hungry—and that they'd better be about the business of filling their bellies. What the snow has reminded them, of course, is not so much that they are hungry, but that in a very short time all their other sources of food will be covered over by a heavy, icy blanket. They feel the urgent call to fill their bellies to bursting, in case their next meal is some time off.

Man is such an odd creature, Father. Why have You made him this way? You've made man to strive toward something better, to improve himself, but then once he has bettered his situation, he forgets those instincts that brought him there in the first place! What have we gained by rising above our primitive instinct for survival? What have we gained by acquiring such sophistication that we need no longer clamor and strive to be fed?

What have we gained by losing our hunger for You?

In winter, even more than during the rest of the year, those living in the wild have one overriding purpose: to feed their hunger. They expend most of their energy in the singular pursuit of simply staying alive. But for modern man, life has become so easy that we've lost the instinct for hunger—the instinct to want something so badly that finding it becomes our passionate, single-minded pursuit.

We build a big, beautiful church, a house of worship to honor Your name—but then we spend all our time gazing upon the expensive edifice instead of Your face. We pave its floor with thick, expensive carpet—but then we forget how to kneel upon it before Your throne. We carry under our arm the latest translation of Your Bible, thick, and bound in rich leather—but we don't take the time to read and learn what You've written there.

I don't want to live that way, Father. I want to keep my hunger. Even if my body has become fat and satisfied, I don't want my heart to forget its yearning. I don't want my mind to forget that You are the source of all it knows.

But I *have* lived that way. It is easy to begin a day without You, and I've become proficient at plowing into each day's activities without first spending time with You. Is my time so much more valuable than Yours that I can keep You waiting while I first tend to my business? I get angry at the doctor who treats *my* time with such callous disregard, yet I so regularly treat *You*—my heavenly Father, my God, my Lord—in the same way.

O God, where did my hunger for You go?

Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Matthew 5:7-12

I used to think of the passage we refer to as the Beatitudes as something set apart, almost detached from the body of Christ's Sermon on the Mount. But I have come to see it more as a preamble or a stating of the over-arching theme of the Sermon. It is as if Jesus opens His discourse with the bottom line—the most important, take-away thought, then He backs up and starts plowing through the nitty-gritty of how these qualities are played out in a life.

Read Matthew 5:1-12.

v7

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL, FOR THEY SHALL RECEIVE MERCY.

NKJV: BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL, FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY.

We often show mercy because God has *already* shown mercy to us. The fifth beatitude, in Matthew 5:7, turns this around. Here Jesus says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

the **merciful** = *eleēmōn* (el-eh-ay'-mone) = actively compassionate; from the root *eleeo*

secular Greek (verb: *eleeo*) ("receive mercy") = to have compassion, be sorry for, show compassion, be merciful

secular Greek (noun: *eleos*) = "the emotion roused by contact with an affliction which comes undeservedly on someone else"; the reverse of envy at another's good fortune; a technical term for the end of the speech for the defense, in which the accused tried to awaken the compassion of the judges.

eleeo and *eleemon* express mercy from man to man, but it is mercy motivated by God's mercy to man—as demonstrated in the freeing and healing of Jesus of Nazareth: God, in His incarnation as the God/man Jesus, answered in person the cry, "Have mercy on us!"

Question: What is the difference between mercy and grace? One pastor has put it this way (paraphrased):

Grace is God *not* giving us what we deserve.
Mercy is God giving us what we do *not* deserve.

So this beatitude is *not* saying "Blessed are those who are kind to others, for others will then be kind to them," but "*Blessed are those who show compassion to others, for they shall know the merciful compassion of their heavenly Father.*"

It is difficult to apply this beatitude in a linear fashion, as it is written. It is, in practice, more *circular*. Most times, I believe, we show mercy on others because God *first* showed mercy to us—not because we expect Him to in the future.

We love, because He first loved us. 1 John 4:19

Nevertheless, God's word makes clear that He *does* show favor to those who demonstrate mercy and grace to others.

Here is the illustration: God pours His mercy into us; as a result, we show mercy to others; as a result, God pours into our lives even more mercy. It is as if "mercy" were some tangible object we can hold in our hand—or put in our pocket. And like Jesus' loaves and fishes, it never runs out! As we spend it, He just pours in even more.

True mercy, however, is expressed without thought of recompense.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 23:25-28

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

Mark 7:14-23

After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. [If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.]" When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.) And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

v8

BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART, FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD.

There are two common interpretations of this beatitude: one, that the purity of heart referred to here is an inner moral purity, in opposition to merely an external piety; two, that the pure in heart are those who are undivided in their loyalty to Christ, without deceit, without guile. Neither of these excludes the other—in fact, some might say that each *requires* the other.

pure = *katharos* (kath-a-ros') = clean, clear, pure.

Jesus declared that the externals were not nearly as important as the *internals*. And in Matthew 23 He makes His point with dramatic clarity.

Read Matthew 23:25-28.

uncleanness = *akatharsia* (ak-ath-ar-see'-ah) = the opposite of "pure" in the beatitude; *impurity* (the quality), physical or moral.

Time and again God emphasizes in His word that what really matters to Him is the condition of the heart.

- Our worship means nothing if it is not sincere.
- Our confession is meaningless if it is not from the heart.
- Our words of thanksgiving and praise are just the flapping of lips if they do not express the condition of our heart.
- Our poverty [v3] means nothing if it is not internal—of the spirit.
- Our acts of righteousness are worth nothing if they are not produced from a righteous heart.
- But Jesus also said that what comes out of a man—good or bad—is the product of his heart. [Read Mark 7:14-23.](#)

What can render us "impure" or "unclean" is that which proceeds *from* us, because it reflects the condition of our heart and mind.

...for they shall see God.

see = *horao* = properly **to stare at** [compare <G3700> (*optanomai*)], i.e. (by implication) **to discern clearly** (physical or mental); by extension to attend to; by Hebrew to experience; passive to appear :- behold, perceive, see, take heed.

Those who have a pure heart have been given the grace to see God in the here and now. Our "purity" comes not from ourselves, but from the pure, spotless Lamb, and along with salvation itself, believers are given the ability to

- to *understand* God and His written word; to discern His righteous path from the wrong
- to be *aware* of Him, to see Him in His creation where others cannot

But we can also interpret this word literally. Matthew Henry makes an interesting point:

Henry: "The happiness of seeing God is promised to those, and those only, who are pure in heart. None but the pure are capable of seeing God, nor would it be a felicity to the impure. What pleasure could an unsanctified soul take in the vision of a holy God? As he cannot endure to look upon their iniquity, so they cannot endure to look upon his purity; nor shall any unclean thing enter into the new Jerusalem; but all that are pure in heart, all that are truly sanctified, have desires wrought in them, which nothing but the sight of God will sanctify; and divine grace will not leave those desires unsatisfied."

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Ephesians 2:13-18

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

Colossians 1:19-20

For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Romans 12:14-18

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

Matthew 5:10-12

"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

In Psalm 17, v15, David declares:

As for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness;
I will be satisfied with Your likeness when I awake.

v9

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS, FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF GOD.

peacemakers = *eirēnopoios* = *pacificatory*, i.e. (subjective) *peaceable* :- making peace; an adjective used here only as a noun.

In the Septuagint, *eirene* is used to translate the Hebrew *shalom*.

shalom = **completeness**, soundness, welfare, peace; from <H7999> (shalam); safe, i.e. (figurative) well, happy, friendly; also (abstract) welfare, i.e. health, prosperity, peace :- × do, familiar, × fare, favour, + friend, × great, (good) health, (× perfect, such as be at) peace (-able, -ably), prosper (-ity, -ous), rest, safe (-ty), salute, welfare, (× all is, be) well, × wholly.

The disciple who is perfect in the sense of bringing the wholeness which comes from God alone and which is intimately bound up with His presence is one who brings peace in the fullest sense of the term shalom. (H. Beck, C. Brown in Brown)

What "peace" are we responsible for?

- It can't be making peace between God and man; only Christ can accomplish that through an individual's belief in Him. [Ephesians 2:13-18; Colossians 1:19-20]
- It can't be making peace for the world; this world will never be truly at peace—nation with nation—until Christ Jesus rules over it.
- It can't be making peace between individuals; we cannot *make* someone be at peace with someone else.

We *are* responsible for the peace we have within ourselves and, more important, the peace we demonstrate to others.

Read Romans 12:14-18.

When we behave this way—when this becomes our way of life—we are upholding the family name. We are behaving as Christ, the one whose name we bear as Christ-ians. We are behaving as—and will "be called"—"sons of God".

v10-12

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN PERSECUTED FOR THE SAKE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. (ff.)

The Beatitudes close with perhaps the toughest "blessed." At a glance it is easy to lump together as a whole these three verses, but there are subtle differences between v10 and vs11-12— different kinds of persecution and different kinds of rewards.

Read vs10-12.

Question: What is the earliest recorded instance of persecution "for the sake of righteousness"? Answer: Cain killing Abel (Genesis 4:3-8).

v10

persecuted = *dioko* (dee-o'-ko) = In secular Greek, literally to chase, pursue, run after, drive away. In the LXX, used primarily of pursuit by hostile soldiers, or by anyone whose intentions are hostile. [i.e., physical harm]

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

2 Timothy 3:10-12

Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Matthew 5:11

"Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me."

Barnes: "We are not to seek persecution. We are not to provoke it by strange sentiments or conduct; by violating the laws of civil society, or by modes of speech that are unnecessarily offensive to others. But if, in the honest effort to be Christians, and to live the life of Christians, others persecute and revile us, we are to consider this as a blessing. It is an evidence that we are the children of God, and that he will defend us."

Read 2 Timothy 3:10-12.

Note especially v12: "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

Even though Paul states this as an absolute, it may still be hard for the typical Christian living in the United States to identify with this. But I also note that neither Paul or Jesus specify that this persecution will always come from human beings. This word means to be pursued for the intention of harm; does that not describe those moments when Satan or his minions take after us? In fact, it is precisely in those times of what one might call "high righteousness"—moments of high spiritual exhilaration, dramatic ministry or victory in Christ—that we experience "the flaming arrows of the evil one" most painfully.

Now, we see a subtle difference if we compare this to v11, where the persecution is more *verbal* in nature.

v11

Read v11.

While the word translated "persecute" is the same as above, the emphasis in this verse is on that which is spoken.

insult^{NASB,NIV}, **revile**^{KJV} = *oneidizo* (on-i-did'-zo) = from <G3681> (oneidos); to defame, i.e. rail at, chide, taunt :- cast in teeth, (suffer) reproach, revile, upbraid.

Brown: "In [the Beatitudes] the meaning of *oneidizo* comes near to that of *empaizo*, which originally meant to behave childishly, to make fun of [or mock], and then to ridicule." [as in the school yard]

say...**evil** against you = **hurtful**, i.e. evil (properly in effect or influence, and thus differing from <G2556> (kakos), which refers rather to essential character, as well as from <G4550> (sapos), which indicates degeneracy from original virtue); figurative calamitous; also (passive) ill, i.e. diseased; but especially (morally) culpable, i.e. **derelict**, **vicious**, facinorous; neuter (singular) mischief, malice, or (plural) guilt; masculine (singular) the devil, or (plural) sinners :- bad, **evil**, **grievous**, **harm**, lewd, **malicious**, **wicked**.

Notice the two conditions:

- First, these insults must be untrue; we cannot be guilty of their accusations. And
- Second, similar to v10, these insults must be instigated by our righteous stand for Christ.

With these in place, vs 10 & 12 tell us that

- Just as in the first beatitude (v3), ours "is the kingdom of heaven," and
- Our reward in heaven is great.

In closing I'd like to go back and summarize this extraordinary passage.

- The Beatitudes are directed not toward the world at large, but toward disciples of Jesus—those sitting at His feet to learn from Him how they are to live.

- There is an organized progression to the Beatitudes:
The beatitudes are all of a package; one cannot pick and choose from the list. Each beatitude flows into the next; each flows out of the preceding. For example, one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness is one who confesses his own spiritual poverty, who mourns over failings in his life, and who graciously considers others more important than himself.

FILLED WITH A CONSECRATED JOY ARE THOSE WHO...

[Matthew 5:3] know they are spiritually poor apart from Christ.

[5:4] grieve with others; cannot live comfortably with their sin, and weep over those times they have fallen short or missed the mark.

[5:5] are humble, and keep their strength or power under control for the sake of others and the name of Christ.

[5:6] crave the nourishment only God can give.

[5:7] take the compassion shown them by the Father and extend it to others.

[5:8] give themselves over to God for His purity and are not hypocrites.

Purity of heart is not of man's making, but is God's gift to the one

- who is poor in spirit
- who mourns
- who is gentle and merciful
- and who hungers and thirsts for righteousness

[5:9] live peaceably, as Christ, as a son of God.

[5:10] have suffered physically for doing what is right.

[5:11] have been ostracized, marginalized, lied about because of their faith.

WE ARE BLESSED BECAUSE WE...

[5:3] have a share in God's Kingdom—both now and for eternity.

[5:4] are sustained by His encouragement and strength.

[5:5] will rule with Him on the New Earth.

[5:6] will be well fed, filled to overflowing, with His righteousness and goodness.

[5:7] will know the tender, merciful compassion of the Father.

[5:8] will not just see God one day in His heaven, but are able to "see" Him—to discern His presence, to understand His word—now.

[5:9] are eternal heirs—members of His family.

[5:10] will inherit everything in His holdings.

[5:12] will receive from the Lord Himself our crowns of reward for a life well-led—and these rewards will become the building blocks of our worship before His throne.

Matthew 5:13

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men."

Now that we have examined the preamble, as we launch into the meat of Christ's sermon on the mount, I would ask you to keep in mind His specific audience. Jesus is teaching ethics to those He considers His immediate disciples—those in whom He wants to invest His deepest, toughest thoughts. This is Christ's post-graduate class in kingdom living—in living other-worldly—for those who care the most about their relationship with Him *and* about their effectiveness in the world.

Does this describe you? Do you care enough to learn and put into practice not just the easy stuff, but the hard teaching of the Master? To get the most out of His sermon on the mount you must constantly, repeatedly put yourself in the place of those twelve sitting closest to Him on the side of that hill.

As a disciple of Christ, what is to be my relationship with the world—those around me, both unbelievers *and* believers? This is the first question Jesus answers—and to get His point across He illustrates it with two basic components of life: **salt** and **light**.

SALT

Read v13.

What a master teacher Jesus was! Every word in this verse vibrates with meaning. Especially to His immediate audience the rich imagery of this verse would have had instant impact.

You are the salt of the earth...

earth = *ge* (ghay) = concrete from a primary word; soil; by extension a region, or **the solid part or the whole of the terrene globe** (including the occupants in each application) :- country, earth (-ly), ground, land, world.

To early, secular Greeks salt was not just a condiment or preservative, but represented a necessary *societal* component. In proverbs of the time, to

- have "eaten a bushel of salt together" meant to be old friends
- "eat the salt in company" meant to be bound by ties of hospitality

Aristotle referred to lasting alliances being made by eating bread and salt, or [even just] salt alone. And (more pertinent to our discussion) Cato, Virgil and Pliny all refer to the ability of salt to improve the productivity of the soil.

The Jews likened the Torah to "salt which the world cannot do without." Salt was used for toothaches and still today in the Arab world, newborn babies are rubbed with salt. Because too much salt could destroy vegetation and render an area uninhabitable, token amounts would be ceremonially sprinkled on a city after its capture, cursing the city with infertility and barrenness.

Small amounts of salt, however were deemed beneficial:

- on fodder as an antiseptic for animals
- on soil to improve crop-bearing

How can disciples of Christ be "salt" to the world around them?

- as a *flavor enhancer*—believers "enhance" the word of God by illustrating it in the flesh to both fellow believers and to a lost generation
- as a *preservative*—believers play a role in preserving lives by sharing the gospel
- as a *fertilizer*—believers enrich the lives of their brothers and sisters in Christ by their example, but they also "fertilize" the ground for the Spirit to minister to those who are lost

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

1 Corinthians 1:20

Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

Matthew 5:14-16

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

...but if the salt has become tasteless...

Modern salt—sodium chloride, produced by evaporation of salt water—is a stable compound that does not lose its flavor, or saltiness. But most of the salt used in ancient times was derived from salt marshes and contained many impurities which could leach out its savor.

There are a few references in the Bible where the phrase “become tasteless” refers to salt, but the phrase more often than not referred to a foolish person.

has **become tasteless** = *mo-rai’-no* = from <G3474> (moros); **to become insipid**; figurative to make (passive act) as a simpleton :- **become fool, make foolish, lose savour; to be foolish.**

Read 1 Corinthians 1:20. (“made foolish”)

...how can it be made salty again?

The answer is, it can’t.

It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

good (for anything) = from <G2479> (ischus); **to have (or exercise) force** (literal or figurative) :- be able, avail, can do ([not]), could, be good, might, **prevail, be of strength**, be whole, + much work.

anything = including feminine oudemia, oo-dem-ee’-ah; and neuter ouden, oo-den’; from <G3761> (oude) and <G1520> (heis); **not even one (man, woman or thing)**, i.e. none, nobody, nothing :- any (man), aught, man, neither any (thing), never (man), no (man), none (+ of these things), not (any, at all, -thing), nought.

Even today in the Mideast, flavorless salt is scattered on the flat roofs of houses to harden the soil and prevent leaks. Since in these humble dwellings the roof is used as we might use a deck or patio, or even living room or play area for the children, this salt would be “trampled under foot.”

trampled under foot = katapateo = from <G2596> (kata) and <G3961> (pateo); to trample down; **figurative to reject with disdain** :- trample, tread (down, underfoot).

Again in the Mideast even today, being “trampled under foot” (when referring to people) is an expression of scorn and ridicule. Now that he is out of power—and dead!—what have we seen the people of Libya doing to portraits of Kadafi?

What does this say about a disciple of Christ who has “lost [his] savor”?

[true salt does not lose its savor; however, true disciples can become foolish]

LIGHT

Read vs14-16.

v14

You are the light of the world.

As in v13, the “you” is emphatic: “You are salt; you are light...” You, my followers, my disciples, and none other.

light = *phōs* = from an obsolete phao (**to shine or make manifest**, especially by rays; compare <G5316> (phaino), <G5346> (phemi)); **luminousness** (in the widest application, natural or artificial, abstract or concrete, literal or figurative) :- fire light.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

world = *kosmos* = probably from the base of <G2865> (komizo); **orderly arrangement**, i.e. decoration; **by implication the world** (in a wide or narrow sense, **including its inhabitant**, literal or figurative [moral]) :- adorning, world.

A city set on a hill cannot be hidden...

set = *keimai* (kay-mai) = **to lie outstretched** (literal or figurative) :- be (appointed, laid up, made, set), lay, lie. Compare <G5087> (tithemi).

hill = *oros* = probably from an obsolete oro (to rise or “rear”; perhaps akin to <G142> (airo); compare <G3733> (ornis)); a mountain (as lifting itself above the plain) :- hill, mount (-ain). **Same as “mountain” in v1.**

Just imagine sitting there at His feet—the Lord Jesus, bathed in holiness, shedding His light upon the world from the side of this mountain, telling His disciples He wanted them to be the same!

hidden = *krypto* = a primary verb; to **conceal** (properly by covering) :- hide (self), **keep secret**, secret [-ly].

“My disciples,” He says, “you cannot keep secret who you are now. You cannot hide *what* you are in Me. You are a light—a luminous city set on a hill!”

Spend some time on your own meditating on this rich imagery of light, and the many ways light is used. For example, a flashlight illuminates darkness, a lighthouse warns ships away from treacherous shoals.

In both the Old and New Testaments light frequently symbolizes

- purity, as opposed to filth,
- truth or knowledge as opposed to error or ignorance,
- divine revelation and presence as opposed to reprobation and abandonment by God.

v15

...nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket...

light = same as above

basket = *modios* = of Latin [i.e., Roman] origin; a modius, i.e. **certain measure for things dry** (the quantity or the utensil) :- bushel.

Not only would this hide the light, but the woven or wooden basket would catch fire!

...but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

Alexander MacLaren gives us the setting:

In every humble house from which His peasant-followers came, there would be a lamp—some earthen saucer with a little oil in it, in which a wick floated, a rude stand to put it upon, a meal-chest or flour-bin, and a humble pallet on which to lie. These simple pieces of furniture are taken to point this solemn lesson. “When you light your lamp you put it on the stand, do you not? You light it in order that it may give light; you do not put it under the meal-measure or the bed. So I have kindled you that you may shine, and put you where you are that you may give light.”

Not only is it counterproductive and wasteful to hide who and what we are in Christ, but how does it make you feel when you have intentionally kept secret your identity in Christ?

Matthew 5:15

...nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

2 Corinthians 4:5-7

For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;

Matthew 5:16

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

Though Jesus uses the phrase "*your* light," we must remind ourselves that this light is not our own, but His. Jesus Himself is the light, as John writes in his gospel account:

In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. (John 1:4-5,9)

Read 2 Corinthians 4:5-7.

v16

Read v16.

[*visibility*: like the light on the lampstand]

NIV, ESV: In the same way, let your light shine...

ASV: Even so let your light shine... (*American Standard Version*)

[*manner*: serve me in such a manner that the Father is glorified]

NASB: Let your light shine... **in such a way...**

[*either*]

KJV: Let your light **so** shine...

shine = *lampo* = a primary verb; **to beam, i.e. radiate brilliancy** (literal or figurative) :- give light, shine.

before men = from <G1722> (en) and <G4314> (pros); **in front of** (in place [literal or figurative] or time) :- against, at, before, (in presence, sight) of; translated, "**in the sight of,**" "**in the presence of.**"

John Gill: ...that the light of the Gospel, which he had communicated to them, the spiritual knowledge of the mysteries of grace, which he had favoured them with, were to be openly declared, and made manifest before men. Light was not given merely for their own private use, but for the public good of mankind; and therefore, as they were placed as lights in the world, they were to hold forth, in the most open and conspicuous manner, the word of light and life.

...*that they may see your good works*: meaning their zeal and fervency; their plainness and openness; their sincerity, faithfulness, and integrity; their courage... their diligence, industry, and indefatigableness (i.e., not grown weary) in preaching the Gospel; their strict regard to truth, the honour of Christ, and the good of souls; as also their very great care and concern to recommend the doctrines of grace, by their example in their lives and conversations.

I.e., that their character would both reveal (reflect) and point to (illumine) Christ to the world.

A cautionary note from Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

Flight into the invisible is a denial of the call. A community of Jesus which seeks to hide itself has ceased to follow him.

If you have not begun doing this already, you should cultivate the habit throughout this study of the Sermon on the Mount of completing each lesson by turning the spotlight of Scripture back on your own life. In this instance,

- Am I **salt** that is still salty and good, or have I lost my savor?
- Am I **light** in a dark world? Does my light shine brightly from a hill top, or do I keep it tucked away for safe keeping?
- Do my **good works** bring glory to the Father or to myself?

Luke 12:58

"For while you are going with your opponent to appear before the magistrate, on your way there make an effort to settle with him, so that he may not drag you before the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison.

Matthew 5:25

"Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison."

Luke 16:17

"But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail."

Matthew 5:18

"For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished."

Matthew 5:17

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill."

In our next passage Jesus continues His dissertation on living other-worldly—not by proffering a brand new version of Scripture, but *by substantiating the old*. His message is one of obedience, submission, and righteousness.

TRANSITION

The abrupt transition from v16 to v17 seems to emphasize (at least to my ears) that in the canon of Scripture we do not have a literal transcription of every word of one, discreet discourse delivered by Jesus on one occasion. I believe that one or more of the following are true:

- it was one message, but only portions are included in Matthew 5-7;
- what has been left out may be questions posed to the Lord (as, perhaps, here);
- the "sermon" has been compiled from multiple discourses.

For just a couple of examples of the latter,

Read Luke 12:58. Compare to Matthew 5:25.

Read Luke 16:17. Compare to Matthew 5:18.

Now, preachers and teachers use the same material on different occasions and audiences all the time, so this could be simple repetition. But it also could be that the different gospel authors compiled the same material differently.

As I stated in our first session, these possibilities make for interesting ruminations, but our purpose here is to keep it simple:

Jesus said it, so we are to understand what He said and apply this truth to our lives.

v17

Read v17.

"the law or the prophets" = the whole of Jewish Scripture at the time

Do not think...

This doesn't necessarily suggest that there were some who actually believed this position, as if Jesus was setting up a counter argument to talk them out of it; this was probably just a rhetorical device employed by Jesus. Or someone posed a question that led Jesus to answer in this way.

...that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets;

abolish^{NASB,NIV}, **destroy**^{KJVS} = *katalyo* (kat-al-oo'-o) = from <G2596> (kata) and <G3089> (luo); **to loosen down** (disintegrate), i.e. (by implication) to **demolish** (literal or figurative); specially [compare <G2646> (kataluma)] to halt for the night :- destroy, **dissolve**, be guest, lodge, come to nought, overthrow, throw down. [like undoing the ties and poles of a tent so that it collapses and is unusable]

I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

fulfill = *pleroo* (play-ro'-o) = from <G4134> (pleres); **to make replete**, i.e. (literal) **to cram** (a net), level up (a hollow), or (figurative) to furnish (or imbue, diffuse, influence), **satisfy**, execute (an office), finish (a period or task), verify (or coincide with a prediction), etc. :- accomplish, × after, (be) complete, end, expire, fill (up), fulfil, (be, **make**) **full** (come), fully preach, perfect, supply. [bringing to full measure]

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Galatians 3:23-25

But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Romans 10:4

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

Matthew 5:18

"For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished."

Hebrews 1:10-12

And, "You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the works of Your hands; They will perish, but You remain; And they all will become old like a garment, And like a mantle You will roll them up; Like a garment they will also be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not come to an end."

Read Galatians 3:23-25.

tutor = *paidagogos* (peye-dah-go-gohs') = from <G3816> (pais) and a reduplicated form of <G71> (ago); **a boy-leader, i.e. a servant whose office it was to take the children to school**; (by implication [figurative] a tutor ["pædagogus"]) :- instructor, schoolmaster.

Read Romans 10:4.

end = *telos* = from a primary *tello* (to set out for a definite point or goal); properly **the point aimed at as a limit, i.e. (by implication) the conclusion of an act or state** (termination [literal, figurative or indefinite], result [immediate, ultimate or prophetic], purpose); specially an impost or levy (as paid) :- + continual, custom, end (-ing), finally, uttermost. Compare <G5411> (phoros).

The religious leaders anticipated a Messiah who would be a *champion of the Law*, while some of Jesus' followers may have expected Him to utterly *replace* the Law with something brand new. Jesus tells them that neither is true.

- Jesus *completes* the Law
- The *purpose* of the Law can now be *fully understood* in the coming of Christ

v18

Read v18.

For truly I say to you...

verily^{KJV}, **assuredly**^{NKJV}, **I tell you the truth**^{NIV} = *amen* (a-mane') = of Hebrew origin [<H543> ('amen)]; properly **firm**, i.e. (figurative) **trustworthy**; adverb **surely** (often as interjection so be it) :- amen, verily.

...until heaven and earth pass away...

pass away^{NASB,NKJV}, **disappear**^{NIV} = *parerchomai* = from <G3844> (para) and <G2064> (erchomai); to come near or aside, i.e. to approach (arrive), **go by (or away)**, (figurative) **perish** or neglect, (causative) avert :- come (forth), go, pass (away, by, over), past, transgress.

In Matthew 24:35 Jesus states that

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away."
(emphasis added)

Read Hebrews 1:10-12.

...not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

smallest letter^{NASB,NIV}, **jot**^{KJVS}, **iota**^{YLT} = *iota* (ee-o'-tah) = of Hebrew origin [the tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet]; "iota", the name of the eighth letter of the Greek alphabet, put (figurative) for a very small part of anything :- jot [from the Hebrew jot (or yod), the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet].

Book Print	Manual Print	Cursive

stroke (of a pen)^{NASB,(NIV)}, **tittle**^{KJVS} = *keraia* (ker-eye'-yah) = feminine of a presumed derivative of the base of <G2768> (keras); something horn-like, i.e. (special) the apex of a Hebrew letter (figurative the least particle) :- tittle.

pass = pass away (above)

accomplished^{NASB,NIV}, **be fulfilled**^{KJVS} = *ginomai* = a prolonged and middle form of a primary verb; **to cause to be ("gen"-erate)**, i.e. (reflexive) to become (come into being), used with great latitude (literal, figurative, intensive,

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 5:19

“Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

2 Timothy 4:1–4

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

etc.) :- arise, be assembled, be (-come, -fall, -have self), be brought (to pass), (be) **come (to pass)**, continue, be divided, draw, be ended, fall, be finished, follow, be found, be fulfilled, + God forbid, grow, happen, have, be kept, be made, be married, be ordained to be, partake, pass, be performed, be published, require, seem, be showed, × soon as it was, sound, be taken, be turned, use, wax, will, would, be wrought.

D. A. Carson: Jesus upholds the authority of the OT Scriptures right down to the “least stroke of a pen.”

v19

Read v19.

Whoever then annuls...

annuls^{NASB}, **breaks**^{KJVS,NIV} = *lyo* (loo-oh) = a primary verb; to **“loosen”** (literal or figurative) :- break (up), destroy, dissolve, (un-) loose, melt, put off. Compare <G4486> (rhegnumi).

(**annul** = “to make no longer binding”)

The difference between “abolish” in v17 and “annul” in v19 is *kata*—down. The word in v17 is stronger, more destructive. It does *not* mean, as some early commentators have said, to violate or disobey.

...one of the least of these commandments,

The Greek *lyo* (above) can mean to break up (κῡvs), as it is used in Acts 27:41 to describe how the waves broke apart the ship on which Paul was being transported. But it is better translated in this context, as in the NASB, to “loosen,” or “relax” the commandments to the point that they are no longer binding.

Isn't that what so many do today? Isn't that—were we to be honest about what lies in the deepest recesses of our heart—what we would *like* to do with God's ethical requirements? Wouldn't it make things easier?

Read 2 Timothy 4:1–4.

So many today have “relaxed” God's word to the point of emasculation—they have rendered it meaningless, impotent. They have removed all the salt so it will taste better to those who would rather emasculate God, reforming Him in *their* image, rather than accepting His desire to reform us in *His*.

...and teaches others to do the same,

A sobering admonition.

...shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven;

least = *elach'istos* = superlative of *elachus* (short); used as equivalent to <G3398> (mikros); least (in size, amount, dignity, etc.) :- least, **very little** (small), smallest.

“Trivialize even the smallest item in God's Law and you will only have trivialized yourself.” (*The Message*)

but whoever keeps and teaches them...

keeps^{NASB}, **does**^{KJVS}, **practices**^{NIV} = *poieo* = a prolonged form of an obsolete primary; to **make or do** (in a very wide application, more or less direct) :- abide, + agree, appoint; exercise...

...he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

great = *megas* = [including the prolonged forms, feminine megale, plural megaloi, etc.; compare also <G3176> (megistos), <G3187> (meizon)]; **big** (literal or figurative, in a very wide application) :- (+ fear) exceedingly, great (-est), **high, large, loud, mighty**, + (be) sore (afraid), **strong**, × to years.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 5:20

“For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:48

“Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Isaiah 61:1-3

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the Lord has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, To grant those who mourn in Zion, Giving them a garland instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.

Matthew 19:23-26

And Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be saved?” And looking at them Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

If you imagine yourself so great that you can dilute even God’s holy word, then you will have rendered yourself the least in His kingdom. If, however, you consider yourself to be the “least of these my brethren”, submitting yourself to the word of God as He wrote it, you will have demonstrated your greatness in Him. (a Lampel paraphrase)

v20

Read v20.

surpasses^{NASB,NIV}, **exceeds**^{KJVS} = from <G4053> (perissos); **to superabound** (in quantity or quality), **be in excess, be superfluous**; also (transposed) to cause to superabound or excel :- (make, more) abound, (have, have more) abundance, (be more) abundant, be the better, enough and to spare, excel, increase, be left, redound, remain (**over and above**).

Frankly, it wouldn’t be that hard. To the ears of First Century disciples, this might seem a daunting challenge. But we in this century, with the advantage of hindsight and the historical record, can see that it wouldn’t be that difficult to surpass the “righteousness” of the scribes and Pharisees.

Even so, quite a challenge. But you think *that* sounds tough? Check out the last verse (48) in this chapter: **Read v48.**

Let’s revisit the passage Jesus read from Isaiah when He announced His true calling and purpose to those in the synagogue in Nazareth—and keep reading beyond where He stopped.

Read Isaiah 61:1-3.

Jesus came to bring the good news that there was now “liberty to captives” and “freedom to prisoners”—to those sitting in ashes of mourning, a garland and “oil of gladness.” Now they would wear garments of praise, rather than a “spirit of fainting”—a spirit of dark, clouded obscurity.

Now they would be called “oaks of righteousness”—strong, reliable—planted not by people, not by the Law, not by the teachings of the religious leaders—the scribes and Pharisees—but planted by the Lord Himself, “that He may be glorified.”

Read Matthew 19:23-26.

Being more righteous than the religious leaders? Being as perfect as our heavenly Father? Impossible. Utterly impossible. Correct.

“With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

YOUR NOTES OR THOUGHTS

Jesus has just finished telling His disciples that He did not come to abolish or weaken the Law, but to fulfill it—to complete it. Now, for the remainder of this chapter He gives them some examples of just what this fulfillment looks like. He introduces each example with the phrase, “You have heard that...” or a variation on it, followed by “But I say...” (the “I” is always emphatic) In other words, with these examples Jesus begins with a passage from the incomplete Law, then explains how that is changed or deepened now that He has completed it.

- v21 (murder)
- v27 (adultery)
- v31 (divorce)
- v33 (oaths and vows)
- v38 (retribution)
- v43 (the focus of love)

you have **heard** = *akouo* (ahk-oo’-o) = a primary verb; to hear (in various senses)
:- give (in the) audience (of), come (to the ears), ([shall]) hear (-er, -ken),
be noised, be reported, **understand**.

D. A. Carson: Daube rightly points out that the first part of Matthew’s formulas means something like “you have understood” or “you have literally understood.” That is, Jesus is not criticizing the OT, but the *understanding* of the OT many of His hearers adopted... Jesus contrasts the people’s misunderstanding of the law with the true direction in which the law points, according to His own authority as the law’s “fulfiller.” He makes no attempt to fence in the law, but declares unambiguously the true direction to which it points.

For an example of this, consider Jesus’ response to the criticism of His disciples picking grain on the Sabbath in Matthew 12:1-8.

Here is why Jesus so amazed the people who heard Him teach—and why He was so hated by the religious leaders. He spoke with the kind of authority the people had never heard before. If, as He declared, He had come to *complete* the law, this gave Him the authority to set them straight on its true meaning. Of this clarity and confidence the common people were in awe—and the scribes and Pharisees were enraged. (*How dare he presume!*)

But this teaching goes even beyond that—beyond just fulfilling the Law. Jesus is using this didactic formula—“*You have heard...*” / “*But I say...*”—to emphasize to His followers that life in Him—what later followers would call “The Way,” and what we would call the Christian life—is to be different. The Kingdom life is to be lived by a different set of rules, a different set of expectations. It is to be... other-worldly.

Matthew 5:21-22

“You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

v21-22

Read vs21-22.

Note the variation between the KJV and the NKJV—indeed, all other translations:

KJV: Ye have heard that it was said **by** them of old time...

NKJV: You have heard that it was said **to** those of old...

Without launching into the gory details of the Greek translations—much of which, I confess, I do not understand—the bottom line is that “to” is correct in this context.

In v21 Jesus quotes the sixth commandment from Exodus 20 and paraphrases multiple texts and traditions regarding the murderous taking of life. “Murder” here,

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 5:21-22

"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

of course, does not refer to every instance of the taking of life, but the malicious or premeditated killing of another human being, either out of anger or hatred, or during the commission of an illegal act.

He says that whoever commits murder shall be liable, etc.

(v21) liable^{NASB}, in danger of the judgment^{KJVS}; (v22) guilty^{NASB}, in danger of...^{KJVS}
 = *enochos* (en'-okh-os) = from <G1758> (enecho); liable to (a condition, penalty or imputation) :- in danger of, **guilty of, subject to**; held in, bound by. **Translated "guilty" (three times) in v22.**

I think I favor the KJVS on this, for when you examine the etymology of the Greek word *enochos*, I believe it is safe to summarize its meaning, "will have to answer for...", which is close to "be in danger of...". If you commit the transgression you will have to stand before the tribunal and answer for what you have done.

Jesus says, in v21, that this is what you have heard about the crime of murder from the Law and the judges. But *I* say... And then He lays out three offenses that speak to the real root of the crime—as D. A. Carson points out,

...the law really points to His own teaching: the root of murder is anger, and anger is murderous in principle. One has not conformed to the better righteousness of the kingdom simply by refraining from homicide.

Matthew Henry: The Jewish teachers had taught, that nothing except actual murder was forbidden by the sixth commandment. Thus they explained away its spiritual meaning. Christ showed the full meaning of this commandment; according to which we must be judged hereafter, and therefore ought to be ruled now. All rash anger is heart murder.

THREE OFFENSES:

angry = *orgizo* = from <G3709> (orge); to provoke or enrage, i.e. (passive) **become exasperated** :- be angry (wroth).

(The word "brother" (adelphos) is used too many times in the NT as a term for a fellow believer to limit this to blood kin.)

raca^{KJVS,NIV}, good-for-nothing^{NASB} = *rhaka* (Aramaic) = empty one, worthless, imbecile, fool.

you fool = *moros* (Greek) = probably from the base of <G3466> (musterion); **dull or stupid** (as if shut up), i.e. heedless, (moral) blockhead, (apparently) absurd :- fool (-ish, × -ishness).

THREE JUDGMENTS OF INCREASING SEVERITY (OR JUDICIAL POWER):

court = *krisis* = **decision** (subject or object, for or against); **by extension a tribunal**; by implication **justice** (specially divine law) :- accusation, condemnation, damnation, judgment. **Legal proceedings, perhaps the court set up in every town.**

supreme court = *synedrion* (soon-ed'-ree-on) = neuter of a presumed derivative of a compound of <G4862> (sun) and the base of <G1476> (hedraios); **a joint session, i.e. (special) the Jewish Sanhedrin**; by analogy a subordinate tribunal :- council.

fiery hell = *pyr geenna* (poor gheh'-en-nah) = lit., "the Gehenna of Fire" = a valley W. and S. of Jerusalem; a ravine once associated with rites for the pagan god Moloch; also a symbolic name for the final place of punishment of the ungodly.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 5:23–24

“Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”

It isn't so much that Jesus is saying that anger is synonymous with murder, but that one does not have to go that far to transgress His new Kingdom level of ethics. And, as always, one must consider this passage as just one part of what Jesus has to say or demonstrate about anger. The disciple of Christ cannot just take this verse and conclude, “Ah-ha. Then I am never to be angry.”

No, we must consider this passage in light of the times Jesus Himself was angry—denouncing the scribes and Pharisees, driving the dishonest money-changers from the temple, rebuking Peter, etc.—and only then draw our conclusion.

vs23–24

In the two illustrations that follow we have an example of how Jesus teaches us in sometimes unexpected ways. At first glance there seems to be an abrupt change of direction at v23; the illustration Jesus offers is not what we expect. But then, we are not the ones in charge.

Read vs23–24.

We might expect Jesus to illustrate His teaching with an example of how to manage *our* anger. Instead, He uses a situation where we have *caused* anger *in someone else*. And note the connection to the previous verses: Jesus consistently emphasizes the internal over the external. The law specified the overt act of murder, while Jesus speaks of anger simmering in the heart. Here we have the external act of ceremonial temple worship, but Jesus focuses, again, on the condition of the heart.

The setting is temple worship, where the supplicant has brought his sacrifice to the altar in the inner court.

presenting, bring = from <G4314> (pros) and <G5342> (phero) (including its alternate); **to bear towards**, i.e. lead to, tender (especially to God), treat :- bring (to, unto) deal with, do, offer (unto, up), present unto, put to.

offering^{NASB,NIV}, **gift**^{KJVS} = a present; specially a **sacrifice** :- gift, offering

I don't care for the KJVS and NIV use of “gift” here. While not inaccurate, to my ears at least it cheapens the manner of worship. A “gift” in our vernacular is something we voluntarily, sometimes unexpectedly give someone. The words “offering” or “sacrifice” carry the necessary weight to signify that we bring to God, in a holy act of worship, what is *due* Him.

brother = same as above (*adelphos*)

...and there remember that your brother has something against you,

To translate this into a modern setting, the offertory has begun and the plate is being passed. As it comes down the row toward you, the Holy Spirit reminds you of an individual who has something against you.

The “Therefore” at the beginning of v23 may hearken back to the behaviors described in v22. Perhaps the anger in the brother was caused by your anger with him, or your intemperate words spoken to Him: *You good-for-nothing, you empty-headed fool!*

I find it interesting that while most commentators take for granted that the one at the altar has done something to cause his brother's anger, and thus must go to the offended brother to ask forgiveness, the text does not come right out and say that.

To me the key of this verse is “...and there remember...” Jesus is speaking less of guilt and confession than the integrity of our relationships with each other. I should not be content to give my offering if the Spirit reminds me that I have offended a brother or sister in Christ, but I should also not be content in my worship if the Spirit has reminded me that an individual is nurturing anger against me *without cause*. I should care about the integrity of the body as a whole, and when that integrity is threatened by rumors, lies, and misinformation turning the affections of someone in the family, I should not rest until I have gone to that person and changed his mind—which is what the word means in v24.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Mark 11:25

"Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions."

Matthew 5:25-26

"Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent."

Luke 12:58-59

"For while you are going with your opponent to appear before the magistrate, on your way there make an effort to settle with him, so that he may not drag you before the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. I say to you, you will not get out of there until you have paid the very last cent."

reconciled = *diallassō* (dee-ah-lahs'-so) = from <G1223> (dia) and <G236> (allasso); **to change thoroughly**, i.e. (mental) to conciliate :- reconcile.
Original secular Greek: change someone's mind.

Whether it is your fault, or just an unfortunate misunderstanding, if you remember it you are to

...leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. (v24)

Only if time...

And it works, in a similar manner, in the opposite direction, as well:

Read Mark 11:25.

vs25-26

The setting for Jesus' first illustration was worship. His second is judicial.

Read vs25-26.

In the ancient world, debtors were jailed until the debt was repaid. So if someone accused you, took you to court, and you were found guilty (you really did owe them the money), you could be immediately thrown in jail.

Here Jesus uses a different word for the idea of "reconciliation":

make friends with^{NASB}, **agree with**^{KJVS}, **settle matters**^{NIV}, **come to terms with**^{ESV}
= *eunoō* (yoo-no-eh'-o) = from a compound of <G2095> (eu) and <G3563> (nous); **to be well-minded, i.e. reconcile :- agree.**

We find the parallel passage for this in Luke 12.

Read Luke 12:58-59.

NASB: make an effort to settle with him

NKJV: make every effort...to settle with him

KJV: give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from him

NIV: try hard to be reconciled with him

Matthew 5:25-26 in *The Message*:

"Or say you're out on the street and an old enemy accosts you. Don't lose a minute. Make the first move; make things right with him. After all, if you leave the first move to him, knowing his track record, you're likely to end up in court, maybe even jail."

Here we see more clearly how this goes with vs23-24. *Instead of being angry, make the first move toward reconciliation.* When someone has something against you—whether at church or on the street—don't get angry about it (even silently, in your heart), calling them names like "you fool," or "you good for nothing." Instead, be the first one to make an effort to change their mind about you. Do whatever you can to replace malice with friendship—even brotherly love.

Matthew 5:27

"You have heard that it was said,
'You shall not commit adultery'"

Matthew 5:28

"...but I say to you that everyone
who looks at a woman with lust for
her has already committed adultery
with her in his heart."

Mark 4:18-19

"And others are the ones on whom
seed was sown among the thorns;
these are the ones who have heard
the word, but the worries of the
world, and the deceitfulness of
riches, and the desires for other
things enter in and choke the word,
and it becomes unfruitful."

Matthew 15:18-20

"But the things that proceed out of
the mouth come from the heart,
and those defile the man. For out
of the heart come evil thoughts,
murders, adulteries, fornications,
thefts, false witness, slanders.
These are the things which defile
the man; but to eat with unwashed
hands does not defile the man."

Matthew 5:27-30

In the previous passage Jesus used the sixth commandment against murder to illustrate how He had come to fulfill the law. Now He turns to the next, seventh, commandment against adultery.

v27

Read v27.

Again Jesus does *not* say, "the commandment says," but, "You have heard that..." He is speaking about their *understanding* of the commandments given by Moses—not God's purpose in handing it down.

commit adultery = *moicheuo* (moy-cue'-oh) = read passages from Brown, p582f.

The OT "understanding" of this commandment was that it dealt more with *theft* than purity. When a man had relations with another man's wife, he was stealing something from the other man, namely his wife. As pointed out in Brown, the woman was guilty of adultery if she had relations with anyone other than her husband, but the man only if it was with a married or engaged woman. But in the NT, based on Jesus' teaching, this was equalized.

More than that, Jesus expanded the definition of adultery.

v28

Read v28.

everyone^{NASB}, **whoever**^{KJVS}, **anyone**^{NIV} = all (i.e., men and women)—**although with contemporaneous societal conventions in mind, as well as literary conventions still in practice, the masculine offender is emphasized.**

with **lust** for her = *epithymeo* (ep-ee-thoo-meh'-o) = from <G1909> (epi) and <G2372> ↓ (thumos); **to set the heart upon, i.e. long for** (rightfully or otherwise) :- **covet, desire**, would fain, lust (after).

thymos (thoo-mos') = from <G2380> (thuo); **passion (as if breathing hard)** :- fierceness, indignation, wrath.

The verb can and was used in a neutral or good sense—one can have a passion for righteous things, such as setting one's heart upon the things of God—but Jesus uses it here and in Mark 4 in a bad, even sinful way in the parable of sower.

Read Mark 4:18-19.

Schonweiss in Brown: Jesus is far from making little of desire, because it "only" operates in the thoughts and wishes of the heart, and not in the realm of deeds. For Jesus, evil desires, just like evil deeds, flow out of and betray the evil heart which has separated itself from God.

Read Matthew 15:18-20.

A good case can be made that the scope of v28 can be broadened further. In the sentence structure of the Greek, the second "her" (*auten*) is unnecessary; it is redundant. Klaus Haacker argues that this is explainable if the second phrase is translated "so as to get her to lust," or "so that she lusts."

Carson: The evidence for this interpretation is strong. The man is therefore looking at the woman with a view to enticing her to lust. Thus, so far as his intention goes, he is committing adultery *with her*, he makes her an adulteress.

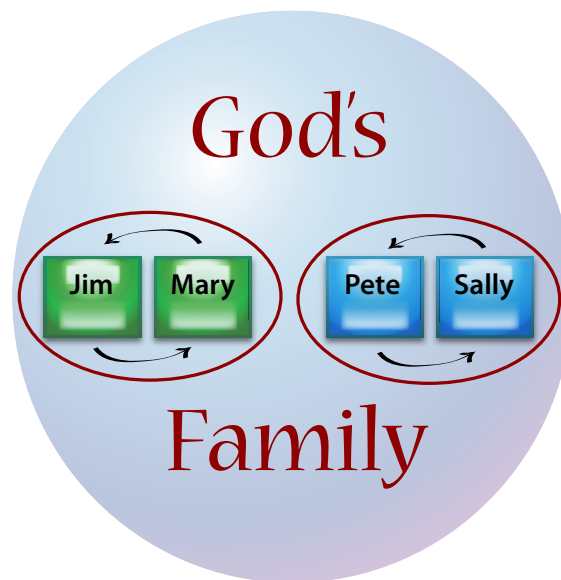
This is better understood if we reverse the sexes. For example, one Sunday morning, as I was leaving the worship service, I noticed a rather generous helping of flesh out of the corner of my eye. When I turned to look, I discovered a young woman—my guess would be high school age—wearing an alarmingly short skirt. I immediately turned away; filled with the glory of worship and instruction from God's word, the last thing I wanted to have before me was a young girl in a short skirt.

It is built into our DNA: women show and men look. And that is an illustration of how a woman can “commit adultery” by doing something toward a man “so that he lusts” after her. By the grace of God I can say that did not happen in this case—but, sadly, I *can* report that that image is still in my mind.

So let's put this into our own context. While there is nothing about Jesus' statement that limits its application to the church, for the purposes of our discussion let's do that. One reason for doing this is that when it takes place within the body of Christ, this behavior results in even more insidious consequences.

I would like to propose the following hypothetical scenario—keeping in mind that while we use the standard convention of making the man the instigator, the principles involved apply to either sex.

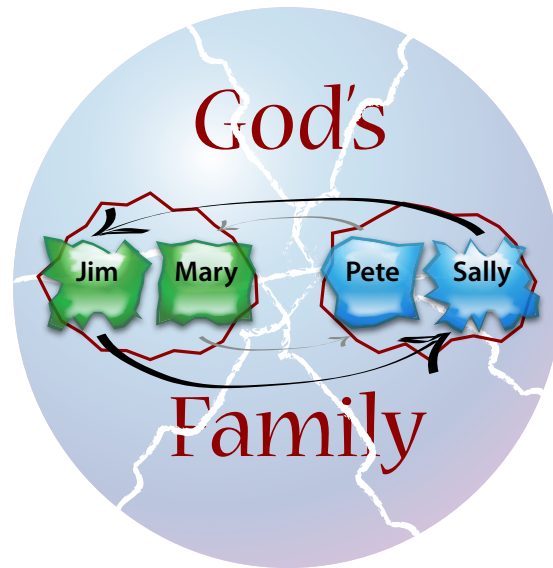
Healthy & Thriving



In this first graphic we see within the church two healthy couples: Jim & Mary and Pete & Sally. The arrows illustrate that each person is limiting his or her sexual desire for their respective spouse. With this, not only does each individual dwell within a healthy couple, but each couple dwells inside a healthy, thriving body of Christ.

Now consider the second graphic, on the following page.

Unhealthy & Fractured



Here we see a different, more confused picture of the couples and the church. Jim, who is married to Mary, is actively entertaining lustful thoughts of Sally, Pete's wife. According to the accepted understanding of the Ten Commandments, there has so far been no transgression—no harm, no foul.

But think about it: even limited to looking and thinking (no physical contact), what has already occurred?

- Jim has *sexualized* a sister in Christ (Sally)
- Jim has diminished in his aspect his own spouse, Mary, by entertaining thoughts that should be reserved for her
- Jim has diminished in his aspect Sally's spouse, Pete—a brother in Christ
- Jim has diminished in his aspect even holy *God* by using gatherings in His name as an occasion to entertain thoughts of lust, rather than holy devotion
- Jim has set temptation before Sally (yes, looks alone can do this)

As a result, the marriage bond between Jim and Mary has been strained, even distorted. Sally, acknowledging the attention from Jim, is now doing the same in his direction. This causes strains in her marriage, which may result in her husband, Pete, who has perhaps sensed what is going on, reaching out to Jim's wife, Mary.

Worst of all, the body of Christ itself has been fractured. The integrity of the church has been threatened.

LOOK VS. LOOK WITH LUST

Many years ago, in another place and time, I was a fashion photographer. As such, I had many opportunities to be around women in all manner of dress and undress. As the photographer, it was my job to look at them with a critical eye, to stare at them, even to be quite close to them physically.

Did I meet Jesus' standard of adultery? No.

I was not looking at them as potential bedfellows, but as working partners—along with the hair stylist, the makeup artist, my assistant—in creating a photograph. And the nature of my gaze was such that it did not incite that sort of response from the model. They understood that it was just business.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 5:29–30

“If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.”

Romans 12:4–5

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Ephesians 4:1–3

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

1 Corinthians 5:4–8

In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

VS29–30: RESPONSIBILITIES

Read vs29–30.

stumble, sin, offend (kjk) = *skandalizo* = verb of <G4625> ↓ (skandalon); **to entrap, i.e. trip up** (figurative stumble [transitive] or **entice to sin**, apostasy or displeasure) :- (make to) offend.

skandalon = probably from a derivative of <G2578> (kampto); **a trap-stick (bent sapling), i.e. snare** (figurative cause of displeasure or sin) :- occasion to fall (of stumbling), offence, thing that offends, stumblingblock.

The KJV “offend” is not appropriate here as we understand and use that word today.

hell = ge-en-na = of Hebrew origin [<H1516> (gay’) and <H2011> (Hinnom)]; valley of (the son of) Hinnom; gehenna (or Ge-Hinnom), a valley of Jerusalem, used (figurative) as a name for the **place (or state) of everlasting punishment** :- hell.

No one imagines that Jesus was speaking literally here, that we should emasculate our bodies in the battle with temptation and sin. Remember Christ’s perspective: these things emanate from the heart, from the imagination. Does gouging out my right eye blind my left as well? Does removing my eyesight remove my lust? Does cutting off my right hand prevent my left from stealing? If I cut off both does it remove my thoughts and desires—or just intensify them to the point of madness?

Albert Barnes: It cannot be supposed that Christ intended this to be taken literally. His design was to teach that the dearest objects, if they cause us to sin, are to be abandoned; that by all sacrifices and self-denials we must overcome the evil propensities of our nature, and resist our wanton imaginations.

Barnes on “your whole body to be thrown into hell”: Thy body, with all its unsubdued and vicious propensities. This will constitute no small part of the misery of hell. The sinner will be sent there as he is, with every evil desire, every unsubdued propensity, every wicked and troublesome passion, and yet with no possibility of gratification. It constitutes our highest notions of misery when we think of a man filled with anger, pride, malice, avarice, envy and lust, and with no opportunity of gratifying them forever. This is all that is necessary to make an eternal hell.

The body of Christ, and especially the local church, is not a business, not a club, but a *family*. And members of healthy, thriving families help each other, they love and respect each other, they help each other with their weaknesses.

Consider the following passages in this context of the members of the family of God helping each other toward sexual and marital purity:

Read Romans 12:4–5.

Read Ephesians 4:1–3.

When this does *not* occur the fracturing of relationships continues well beyond the individual, the immediate couple or family; it proceeds to threaten the integrity of the *church family* itself. Perhaps the best illustration of this is given by Paul in his first letter to the church in Corinth. He has learned that sexual immorality is not just occurring in that church, but is being openly accepted as a demonstration of “grace.” Here is what Paul tells the church to do about it—and why:

Read 1 Corinthians 5:4–8.

That beautiful bond of sincerity and truth, of forbearance, tolerance and love that is the healthy body of Christ, is fractured when people start looking at the wrong people for the wrong reason.

Matthew 5:31

"It was said, 'Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce'"

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance."

Jeremiah 3:1-3

God says, "If a husband divorces his wife And she goes from him And belongs to another man, Will he still return to her? Will not that land be completely polluted? But you are a harlot with many lovers; Yet you turn to Me," declares the Lord. "Lift up your eyes to the bare heights and see; Where have you not been violated? By the roads you have sat for them Like an Arab in the desert, And you have polluted a land With your harlotry and with your wickedness. Therefore the showers have been withheld, And there has been no spring rain. Yet you had a harlot's forehead; You refused to be ashamed."

When I was a young kid, there were certain things I considered impossible. I thought color TV was impossible. I thought it was impossible for a huge passenger plane to stay up in the air. I could see with my own eyes that they were, indeed, possible, but they remained utterly inexplicable to me.

I can't think of anything else I have taught where I have felt so over my head as with our next two verses in Matthew 5—vs31-32. And the main reason is that even as I begin my seventieth decade on this earth, I still think of divorce as "impossible." I see it around me, I know it exists, but for the life of me I just cannot comprehend it.

Understand, this is not judgment; I would not presume to judge anyone who has been divorced. It is simply naïve confusion on my part over how it is possible: How can two people who have become one flesh in God, be torn apart? And once they have, how do they survive?

Now, I say this not as a preamble to an in-depth discussion on divorce. In our midst we have some who could speak painfully, even eloquently from personal experience on this subject. Would that we had time to plumb the depths of their wisdom—but we don't. My only reason for introducing the subject in this way is to reveal that I come to it wholly dependant on God's word and its wise scholars, without any personal experience of my own. And for that I give God the praise and credit.

Our purpose here is not to understand divorce, but to *understand what Jesus has said about it*.

v31-32: DIVORCE

Vs31-32 address divorce, and vs33-37 address vows. I had intended to group vs31-32 with the previous session, but could not because of the constraints of time. But, in a way, I think they may be better companions to the *following* verses than the preceding—for what is marriage but making a vow, and what is divorce but *breaking* that vow.

Read v31.

In v31 Jesus does not quote from the Ten Commandments, as earlier, but from the extended ordinances also dictated by God through Moses in the book of Deuteronomy.

Read Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

The religious leaders had latched onto v1—the God-ordered regulation by which a man could cut his marriage in two (which is what the Hebrew word translated "divorce" means)—one with pretty broad criteria.

indecency, uncleanness = *erwa* (air-vah') = from <H6168> ('arah); **nudity**, literal (especially the pudenda) or figurative (**disgrace, blemish**) :- nakedness, **shame**, unclean (-ness). **Literally, nakedness that causes shame by the display of the exterior genitals—esp. female.**

You can imagine that down through the centuries this had been pulled and twisted in so many directions that a man could divorce his wife for just about any reason. No proof was required; he just wrote out a document, handed it to her, and showed her the door. What we *can* say is that her offense could not be adultery; for that she would not have been divorced, but stoned to death.

Marriage and family are God's earthly picture of our relationship with Him. Time and again Jehovah equated unfaithfulness to Him with harlotry, prostitution. Jeremiah's restating of this passage in Deuteronomy makes the association clearer.

Read Jeremiah 3:1-3.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 5:32

"but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Malachi 2:14-16

"Yet you say, 'For what reason?' Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. For I hate divorce," says the Lord, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the Lord of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."

Matthew 19:3-6

Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

Matthew 19:7-9

They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

God's precepts about the purity and integrity of marriage are never just about human-to-human relationships, but stand as an earthly representation of the human-to-God relationship. The Lord says, *You sent Me away and had relations with other Gods. Now you want to come back to Me, but you have been violated. You are impure.*

v32

Read v32.

divorces = *apolyo* (ap-ol-oo'-o) = from <G575> (apo) and <G3089> (luo); **to free fully**, i.e. (literal) relieve, **release**, **dismiss** (reflexive depart), or (figurative) let die, pardon, or (specifically) divorce :- (let) depart, dismiss, divorce, forgive, let go, loose, put (send) away, release, **set at liberty**.

unchastity, sexual immorality, fornication = *porneia* = from <G4203> (porneuo); **harlotry** (including adultery and incest); figurative idolatry :- **fornication**.

Jesus Himself expands on this later in the gospel. But let's first go back to God's most succinct statement about divorce.

Read Malachi 2:14-16.

Now let's look at the passage in Matthew where the Pharisees challenge Jesus about this.

Read Matthew 19:3-6.

Here is the root of it. God created man. God created woman. And God created their holy union in marriage. He invented—for His and their good—the remarkable concept that when a man and woman are married by Him they become *one flesh*. He has joined them together. And when that one flesh is torn asunder, cut in two, it does violence to one of God's most beautiful creations.

Read Matthew 19:7-9.

I cannot improve upon what D. A. Carson has to say about this:

Carson: Both Matthew and Mark show that Jesus taught that Moses' concession reflected not the true Creation ordinance but the hardness of men's hearts. Divorce is not part of the Creator's perfect design. If Moses permitted it, he did so because sin can be so vile that divorce is to be preferred to continued "indecentness." This is not to say that the person who, according to what Moses said, divorced his spouse was actually committing sin in so doing; but that divorce could even be considered testified that there had already been sin in the marriage. Therefore any view of divorce and remarriage (taught in either Testament) that sees the problem only in terms of what may or may not be done has already overlooked a basic fact—divorce is never to be thought of as a God-ordained, morally neutral option but as evidence of sin, of hardness of heart. The fundamental attitude of the Pharisees to the question was wrong.

YOUR NOTES OR THOUGHTS

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 5:33

"Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.'"

Numbers 30:2

"If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth."

Deuteronomy 23:21-23

"When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the Lord your God will surely require it of you. However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you. You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God, what you have promised."

Matthew 5:34-37

"But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil."

Matthew 23:16-22

"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.' You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it."

v33-37: VOWS

Read v33.

Here Jesus does not quote a specific OT passage, but gives a summary statement that draws from a number of passages.

Read Numbers 30:2.

Read Deuteronomy 23:21-23.

And once again Jesus answers this with, "But *I* say..."

Read vs34-37.

What is Jesus saying with this?

The Jews began with the written Torah, the five books of Law God dictated to Moses. For centuries the Torah was taught by word of mouth, which is referred to as the *Oral* Torah. In the second century the oral law was compiled in a 63-volume document called the Mishnah. This was taught, along with oral explanation. In the fifth century, it was decided that this was too confusing for people, so the oral explanation was written down in a massive collection of commentary known as the Gemara. The Mishnah along with the Gemara commentary form the Talmud.

Much of this post-dates the time of Jesus, of course. But in a smaller way this expansion of God's original law had already taken place, with oral traditions piled onto the more succinct law. So even in Jesus' time this business of swearing and oath-taking had been fine tuned into a very detailed mish-mash of which oaths were binding and which were not. For a small glimmer of this, turn to Matthew 23.

Read Matthew 23:16-22.

In Leviticus 19:12 God tells Moses:

"You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the Lord."

Jesus cuts right to the chase. He says it makes no difference on what your oath or vow is based—everything still points back to God.

- heaven is the *throne* of God
- earth is His *footstool*
- Jerusalem is His *city*
- and only God knows the number of hairs on your head (and their true color!)

No matter what you take your oath by, you are swearing by the name of God. And this is so serious, with such heavy ramifications, that it is better that you not swear by anything at all. Just mean what you say. That is all God asks of you: just be truthful in everything you do and say.

You shouldn't need to add weight to your "yes" by appending an oath. Just stand by your "yes"!

Matthew 5:38

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

Deuteronomy 19:15-21

"A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed. If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days. The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you. Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."

Matthew 5:39

"But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also."

Matthew 5:38-48

GOING THE EXTRA MILE: vs38-42

v38

Read v38.

Jesus draws from three OT passages:

Exodus 21:24
Leviticus 24:20
Deuteronomy 19:21

Read Deuteronomy 19:15-21.

Of the three, this passage shows the *judicial* context the best. The Law never said the one harmed could *himself* exact retribution. It was to be handled in a court of law, with more than one witness required, followed by a thorough investigation. If found guilty, the *court* would exact the appropriate punishment. Leviticus 19:17-18 spoke explicitly that the individual was not to take vengeance:

'You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely *reprove* your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.'

So this is Jesus' starting point, and He does not dispute the law as it applies to the courts. But of course He is adding a new layer to this law; in His message here Jesus is saying more than just let the courts do their job instead of doing it yourself. In the next few verses He demonstrates—as He has before—how things have changed under Him.

v39

Read v39.

resist = *anthistemi* (anth-is'-tay-mee) = from <G473> (anti) and <G2476> (histemi); **to stand against**, i.e. **oppose** :- resist, withstand; to set against.

Note: not only are we not to *fight back*, but we are not even to *set* ourselves *against*—that is, as one would brace himself against a buffeting wind. We are to, as it were, roll with the punches, as Jesus illustrates in what follows.

evil person = *poneros* (po-nay-ros') = from a derivative of <G4192> (ponos); **hurtful, i.e. evil** (properly in effect or influence, and thus differing from <G2556> (kakos), which refers rather to essential character, as well as from <G4550> (sapro), which indicates degeneracy from original virtue); figurative calamitous; also (passive) ill, i.e. diseased; but especially (morally) culpable, i.e. derelict, **vicious**, facinorous; neuter (singular) mischief, malice, or (plural) guilt; masculine (singular) the devil, or (plural) sinners :- bad, evil, grievous, harm, lewd, **malicious, wicked** (-ness). See also <G4191> (ponerotos).

evil person = **which some**, i.e. **any that**; also (definite) which same :- × and (they), (such) as, (they) that, in that they, what (-soever), whereas ye, (they) which, who (-soever). Compare <G3754> (hoti).

Almost all translations have used the word "person" here to emphasize that Jesus is not speaking of evil in general, as a Satanic force, such as temptation—which the kjv might lead one to believe—or Satan himself. Remember the context here: the best way to interpret this is "do not resist in a court of law." (Carson)

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

1 Peter 2:18–20

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.

Isaiah 50:6–7

I gave My back to those who strike Me, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. For the Lord God helps Me, Therefore, I am not disgraced; Therefore, I have set My face like flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed.

Matthew 5:40

“If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.”

Matthew 5:41

“Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.”

Matthew 5:42

“Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.”

Deuteronomy 23:19–20

“You shall not charge interest to your countrymen: interest on money, food, or anything that may be loaned at interest. You may charge interest to a foreigner, but to your countrymen you shall not charge interest, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all that you undertake in the land which you are about to enter to possess.”

If it *were* the case that Jesus refers to Satan or evil itself, we would not have the counsel from Peter, James—and Paul’s injunction in Ephesians 6:13 to “...take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.”

Instead, when it comes to people—even wicked people—we are to “patiently endure.”

Read 1 Peter 2:18–20.

Jesus follows this with four illustrations to make His point. This first illustration has to do less with injury than insult.

slaps, strikes, smite = *rhapizo* = from a derivative of a primary *rhēpo* (to let fall, “rap”); to slap :- smite (with the palm of the hand). Compare <G5180> (tupto).

Read Isaiah 50:6–7.

The application for us is not so much for those times when someone inflicts some minor physical injury on us, but when someone has done harm to our feelings, our pride, our reputation. Look back to the cross. Remember the abuse, the humiliation that Jesus suffered on your behalf. Did He strike back? Did He sue them in court? No, He “gave His back” to them, and “did not cover His face,” because “the Lord God” was His help.

What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? (Romans 8:31 NKJV)

The second illustration is similar, but deals with our possessions.

Read v40.

Ancient dress consisted of essentially two garments. The first—here referred to as **shirt**, or **tunic**, or **coat**—was the layer worn next to the skin. So “shirt” is a pretty good translation for us today. The second—here referred to as **coat** or **cloak**—was the outer layer. Of the two, this was the most valuable and utilitarian. It would be removed while doing heavy work, and would be used as a blanket at night.

Under Mosaic law, one’s outer cloak could not be taken away for any reason. Exodus 22:26 states that even if it is given in pledge, it must be returned to its owner before nightfall, for it would be necessary for him to keep warm at night. Yet Jesus says that if someone is claiming your undershirt, give him not only that, but your precious outer coat as well.

Here is the common thread: Life in Christ means living *beyond* the law—beyond the minimum that is expected. It means “going the extra mile”—which is the third illustration.

Read v41.

Note the word translated “forces” or “compels”:

forces, compels = of foreign origin [compare <H104> (‘iggera’ (Chaldee))]; properly **to be a courier, i.e., (by implication) to press into public service** :- compel (to go); to impress, or commandeer. [refers to the Roman practice of commandeering civilians to carry the luggage of military personnel a prescribed distance]

Instead of being angry that you are forced to do this thankless task, you volunteer to carry the load even further.

Read v42.

This verse must be interpreted in light of the Mosaic law’s directive about not charging interest.

Read Deuteronomy 23:19–20.

The idea here is not to loan money for the purpose of making a profit, but to be generous with a brother or sister in need. We are to “give” without thought of repayment.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 5:43

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

Matthew 5:44

"But I say to you, love your enemies
and pray for those who persecute
you,"

These four illustrations are not to be taken in a legalistic, letter-of-the-law sense; that is not Jesus' purpose here. For example, v40 is clearly hyperbolic: no first-century Jew would ever be seen in public wearing only a loincloth, returning home after giving away the rest of his clothing. Nor are we to give all of our money away, thus jeopardizing the well-being of our own family. Nor are we to encourage sloth by doling out vast sums to every panhandler too lazy to get a job.

The Lord's point is that the Christian is to be *different* in this world. Jesus is just expanding on how He began this sermon. Go back up to the beginning of this chapter. and re-read vs3-16.

WHO DO YOU LOVE?: vs43-48

v43

Read v43.

Jesus begins this segment by quoting a truncated form of Leviticus 19:18—which adds "...as yourself," and then adds, "...and hate your enemy."

neighbor = neuter of a derivative of *pelas* (near); (adverb) close by; as noun, a neighbor, i.e. **fellow** (as **man, countryman, Christian or friend**) :- near, neighbour.

hate = *miseo* (mis-eh'-o) = from a primary *misos* (hatred); **to detest** (especially to persecute); by extension to love less :- hate (-ful).

The latter, of course, is not a quotation but, as Jesus says, something His listeners would have heard by oral instruction, probably from their rabbi at the synagogue. But nowhere does God tell the Jews to hate those who were outside their community. They came up with that all by themselves.

v44

Read v44.

Notice that Jesus does not hedge His bets here. There is no softening going on below the surface. The word translated love is the same as above—

love = *agapao* = perhaps from *agan* (much) [or compare <H5689> ('agab)]; to love (in a social or moral sense) :- (be-) love (-ed). Compare <G5368> (*phileo*).

and the word translated enemy in v43 and enemies here is the real thing:

enemy/enemies = *echthros* = **from a primary echtho (to hate); hateful** (passive **odious, or** active **hostile**); usually as a noun, an adversary (especially Satan) :- enemy, foe.

In other words, Jesus is not just saying love those who are not your neighbors, but love those who actively despise you! Oh, and while you're at it, pray for those from whom you would normally flee for your life!

persecute = *dioko* = a prolonged (and causative) form of a primary verb *diō* (**to flee**; compare the base of <G1169> (*deilos*) and <G1249> (*diakonos*)); **to pursue** (literal or figurative); by implication to persecute :- ensue, follow (after), given to, (suffer) persecute (-ion), press forward.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 5:45

“...so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

Romans 5:6-8

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Matthew 5:46-47

“For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?”

Matthew 15:26-27

And He answered and said, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” But she said, “Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”

Matthew 5:48

“Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Matthew 5:16

“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

v45

Why? So that our behavior will be like that of our fellow Son—Christ Jesus.

Read v45.

John R. W. Stott: Jesus seems to have prayed for His tormentors actually while the iron spikes were being driven through His hands and feet; indeed the imperfect tense suggests that He kept praying, kept repeating His entreaty, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). If the cruel torture of crucifixion could not silence our Lord’s prayer for His enemies, what pain, pride, prejudice or sloth could justify the silencing of ours?

Beyond that, we have the example of God the Father, who loved *us* when we were His enemies.

Read Romans 5:6-8.

V45 is a description of what theologians since Calvin have termed God’s “common grace”—the favor He bestows on all, regardless the condition of their soul. If we thank God for sending the rain that produces a bountiful harvest in Linda’s garden, then how do we explain the same effect to our unbelieving neighbor’s garden?

Common grace.

v46-47

Again Jesus emphasizes just how different are the ethics of His kingdom.

Read vs46-47.

Anyone can love someone who loves them back. Anyone can be neighborly and polite to someone who is neighborly to them. And if someone who loves them can be found, even the hated tax collector would love them back.

Anyone can welcome with open arms their kindred. Even the Gentile dogs do that.

["dogs": Matthew 15:26-27]

v48

v48 concludes this long list of antitheses, which began with v21.

Read v48.

Not in perfection, but in wholeness. Not in degree, but in kind.

Of course Jesus does not mean be as perfect as God is perfect, but set yourself on His high and holy path, rather than the base path of men.

Read v16.

Live your life by these principles. Live in such a way that when people see your life, they think of God.

YOUR NOTES OR THOUGHTS

CHAPTER 6 OUTLINED

Part One: vs1-18

Jesus establishes His premise: <i>Don't make a show of your righteousness; do it for the right reasons.</i> Then follows it with application:		1: Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.	
		WRONG WAY	RIGHT WAY
<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg); font-family: cursive; font-size: 4em; margin-right: 10px;">Hypocrisy</div> <div style="font-size: 6em; line-height: 1;">}</div> </div>	GIVING	2: So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.	3-4: But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.
	PRAYER	5: When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.	6: But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.
		7-8: And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.	<i>[The disciple's prayer will be addressed separately.]</i>
	FORGIVENESS	15: But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.	14: For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
	FASTING	16: Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.	17-18: But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.
		<i>D. A. Carson:</i> “[Jesus uses as examples] the three acts of Jewish piety—alms-giving, prayer, and fasting. In each act the logical structure is the same: (1) a warning not to do the act to be praised by men, (2) a guarantee that those who ignore this warning will get what they want but no more, (3) instruction on how to perform the act of piety secretly, and (4) the assurance that the Father who sees in secret will reward openly.”	

CHAPTER 6 OUTLINED

Part Two: vs19-34

Jesus then compares life in which our dependency—even allegiance—is in/with the world, to life in which our dependency is fully in the God of heaven.

Jesus then compares life in which our dependency—even allegiance—is in/with the world, to life in which our dependency is fully in the God of heaven.				
<div>World-mindedness</div>	<div>Allegiance</div>	TREASURE	TRUSTING IN THE WORLD 19: Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.	TRUSTING IN GOD 20-21: But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
		LIGHT	23: But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!	22: The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.
		SLAVERY	24: No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.	
	<div>Anxiety</div>	LIFE	25: For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?	26-27: Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?
		CLOTHING	28a: And why are you worried about clothing?	28b-30: Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!
		TOMORROW	31-32a: Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things...	32b-34: for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Matthew 6:1

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 5:16

“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

Mat. 6:1-6, 16-18

v1

This verse sets the over arching premise for verses 2-17.

Read v1.

righteousness vs. alms

righteousness^{NASB,NIV}, **alms**^{KJV} = *dikaioσynē* (dik-ah-yos-oo'-nay) = from <G1342> (dikaioσ); equity (of character or act); specially (Christian) justification :- righteousness.

Most agree that the correct word here is “righteousness,” and that the use of “alms” in the KJV may be the result of a marginal gloss (something inserted alongside the text meant to help explain the word) that a later copyist worked into the text itself.

However, the KJVs (NKJV: “charitable deeds”—a softened, yet related variation on “alms”) are not entirely incorrect—they have just made a logical jump based on how a Jew would have understood this. Based on their culture, a Jew hearing this word translated “righteousness” would have immediately thought of giving alms to the poor.

Lightfoot: That our Savior certainly said [the word translated] righteousness I make no doubt at all; but, that that word could not be otherwise understood by the common people than of alms, there is as little doubt to be made. For although the word [for righteousness], according to the idiom of the Old Testament, signifies nothing else than righteousness; yet now, when our Savior spoke these words, it signified nothing so much as alms.

Taken this way, some treat v1 as belonging with vs2-4, on alms, but most modern commentators, interpreting this word in the more general sense as we would today, treat v1 as an introduction for vs2-18—which is how we will use it.

The “righteousness” intended here speaks of a more external, demonstrated behavior that is the product of a changed heart. Thus I think the NASB strikes the correct balance with “practicing your righteousness”—i.e., working out in your day-to-day life the transformation of internal motives wrought by Christ.

Note that Jesus’ emphasis here on not making a show of your righteousness does not contradict what He said in chapter 5.

Read Matthew 5:16.

When performed with the right motives, our righteous acts glorify our Father in heaven. When they are performed with wrong motives—to win the acclaim of men—they bring shame upon ourselves, disrepute to the body of Christ, and very often results that are not at all what we intended.

Jesus does not prohibit practicing our righteousness before men—only doing it “to be noticed by them.” This is the criteria of the heart. Jesus is still on topic: the Law emphasized the external act, but Jesus, in *fulfilling* the Law (5:17), emphasizes the condition of the individual’s heart. And the reward spoken of here is not grace—

reward = *misthos* = apparently a primary word; **pay for service** (literal or figurative), good or bad :- hire, reward, wages.

—but refers to how the Lord will portion out wages at the believer’s judgment.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 6:2

"So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full."

Matthew 6:3-4

"But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."

1 Corinthians 3:12-15

Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

v2

Jesus' first example deals with our giving—not our regular offering or tithe, but that which we give over and above to those in need. And note His assumption—that we *will* do this.

As with all three, He begins from the negative—the wrong way to do it.

Read vs2.

Similar to the word translated righteousness in v1, v2 begins with less in the Greek than we see in our various translations.

KJV: doest alms

NKJV: do a charitable deed

NIV & ESV: give to the needy

Young's Literal: **do kindness**

NASB: give to the poor

The words "give," "alms," and "poor" or "needy" are not there, but have been extrapolated from the words that are:

give^{NASB,NIV}, **do**^{NKJV}, **doest**^{KJV} = *poieo* = a prolonged form of an obsolete primary; to *make* or *do*

alms^{KJV}, **charitable deed**^{NKJV}, **poor**^{NASB}, **needy**^{NIV} = from <G1656> (eleos); **compassionateness**, i.e. (as exercised towards the poor) **beneficence**, or (concretely) a benefaction :- alms (-deeds).

So, in keeping with its name, the Young's Literal Translation comes the closest with "**do kindness.**"

...sound a trumpet before you

Jesus is probably not employing a hyperbolic metaphor here—as we would say "toot your own horn"—but could be referring to the practice of sounding trumpets to proclaim the beginning of public fasts. These very public occasions that included prayers in the street and alms giving afforded perfect opportunities for ostentatious "righteousness."

...so that they may be honored by men

We don't have to struggle to understand this. It still goes on today. It is perfectly natural for us to observe piety done well in others and conclude that they are extraordinarily "spiritual" and righteous—when all they may be is just good speakers, or worse, good actors.

...they have their reward in full.

Jesus says that when we do even right things, but for the wrong reason, whatever we get from it here on earth—profit, the accolades of men—that's it. There will be no forthcoming reward in eternity.

v3-4

Read vs3-4.

...do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing

Not only is this a proverbial expression for doing something secretly, but it suggests to me that we are to make so little of it that even *we* forget that we have done it. If my right hand did it, but my left hand remains ignorant of the deed, then perhaps the brain in between has forgotten it entirely. We are not to compile mental or physical lists of our good deeds. If we do, they and the paper they are written on will go up in smoke on The Day. **Read 1 Corinthians 3:12-15.**

John Gill: Acquaint not thy nearest and dearest friend with it; let not one that sits at thy left hand know what thou art doing with thy right hand.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Hebrews 4:13

And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Matthew 6:5

"When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full."

Matthew 6:6

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

in **secret** = *kryptos* = from <G2928> (krupto); **concealed, i.e. private** :- hid (-den), inward [-ly].

The NASB and NIV add the words "what is done" to steer us toward the right interpretation of our heavenly Father's behavior. "Father who sees in secret" is technically correct, but some might take that to mean that His *seeing* is secret, rather than it speaking about His ability and practice to *see what is secret*. For God's seeing is not secret at all; His word makes it clear that He can and does do this.

Read Hebrews 4:13. (and it is good that we remember He does this)

Finally, the word "reward" is not the same as in v1, which meant a wage for service rendered.

reward = *apdidomi* (-ee) = from <G575> (apo) and <G1325> (didomi); **to give away, i.e. up, over, back**, etc. (in various applications) :- deliver (again), give (again), (re-) pay (-ment be made), perform, recompense, render, requite, restore, reward, sell, yield.

In other words, when we give to others for the right reasons, with the right motives, our heavenly Father does not render us a wage owed to us for a service rendered, but *gives back* to us over and above what we have given to others.

v5-6

In v5 Jesus switches to the second area of "practiced righteousness": prayer.

Read v5.

We may need to remind ourselves with this verse that, again, Jesus is talking about the condition of our heart—the reason and motive behind our prayer. He is not telling us that it is wrong to *stand* when we pray; in the Bible people pray in all manner of physical postures. Nor is He telling us that it is wrong to pray in public; if so, there are an awful lot of people in the Bible doing it wrong.

But here again Jesus buttonholes motive: "...so that they may be seen by men."

hypocrites = *hypokrites* = from <G5271> (hupokrinomai); an actor under an assumed character (stage-player), i.e. (figurative) a dissembler ("hypocrite") :- hypocrite.

Originally simply the term for an actor—especially one hiding behind a mask—"by the first century the term came to be used for those who play roles and see the world as their stage." (Carson)

Read v6.

inner room, closet = *tameion* (tah-may'-on) = a dispensary or magazine, i.e. **a chamber on the ground-floor or interior of an Oriental house (generally used for storage or privacy, a spot for retirement)** :- secret chamber, closet, **storehouse**.

The best way to think of this verse is like that old definition of character: True character is not what we do when others are looking, but what we do when *no one* is looking.

Jesus isn't saying we should only pray in private; He is saying that there is something wrong with our prayer life if we only do it for others to see and be impressed by our piety and verbiage. There is something wrong with your heart if you have a reputation for eloquent public prayers, but dust and cobwebs are gathering in your prayer closet.

Are you spending time alone with God—even when no one is looking? Even then we must beware: Are you foolishly trying to impress even *God*, rather than speaking simply from your heart? In God's economy, eloquence is worth far less than sincerity.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 6:16

"Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full."

Matthew 6:17-18

"But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."

v16-18

We're going to skip down to v16 now. We'll discuss vs7-15 in our next session. To close this session we will look at Jesus' third and last example of Jewish piety, found in vs16-18.

Read v16.

The pattern is the same here: Don't fast like those who do it for show. If you do, whatever points you get for it on earth—that's it.

gloomy face = sad countenance (KJVS) mournful

neglect their appearance = *aphanizo* = from <G852> (aphanes); **to render unapparent**, i.e. (active) consume (**becloud**), or (passive) disappear (be destroyed) :- corrupt, **disfigure**, perish, vanish away.

neglect their **appearance** = *prosopon* = from <G4314> (pros) and ops (the visage; from <G3700> (optanomai)); **the front** (as being towards view), i.e. the countenance, aspect, appearance, surface; by implication **presence, person** :- (outward) appearance, × before, countenance, face, fashion, (men's) person, presence.

Literally, distort their faces, i.e. discolor their faces with makeup (just like a *hypokrites*!)

Read vs17-18.

Fasting is very much like speaking in tongues in that it is meant to be a spiritual intercourse with God. True speaking in tongues is our spirit speaking to the Holy Spirit in the language of heaven, and is meaningless to humans unless translated or interpreted.

For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries.
(1 Corinthians 14:2)

Far from speaking against fasting, Jesus again assumes that His disciples *will* fast ("when"). As Wayne Grudem points out, in Scripture there is a close relationship between prayer and fasting, and that we fast to

- increase our sense of humility and dependence on the Lord;
- give more time to prayer;
- heighten our sense of sacrificial living for the Lord;
- hone our skills to refrain from sin, since refraining from eating is a good exercise in self-discipline.

Fasting isn't for show, but for improving and tightening our relationship with our heavenly Father.

...*have their reward in full.*

C. S. Lewis: Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in; aim at earth and you will get neither.

Matthew 6:7

"And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words."

1 Kings 18:26

Then they took the ox which was given them and they prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, "O Baal, answer us." But there was no voice and no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they made.

SESSION 11: JESUS' MODEL PRAYER

Matthew 6:7-15

We should never forget that prayer with our heavenly Father is a privilege. As much as anything else in our lives, the ability to communicate one-on-one with an attentive, loving God is a gift of grace, and should not be treated lightly.

v7-8

Read v7.

meaningless^{NASB}, **vain (empty)**^{KJVS} **repetition** = *battalageo* = from Battos (a proverbial stammerer) and <G3056> (logos); to stutter, i.e. (by implication) to prate tediously :- use vain repetitions.

The classic *Vine's* gives us extra insight into this word:

To repeat idly. The word is probably from an Aramaic phrase and onomatopoeic in character [i.e., a word that mimics what it describes]. The rendering of the Sinaitic Syriac is, "Do not be saying *battalatha*, idle things," i.e., meaningless and mechanically repeated phrases, the reference being to pagan (not Jewish) modes of prayer. *Battalos*, "the Gabbler," was a nickname for Demosthenes, the great orator, assigned to him by his rivals.

Gentile = pagan, heathen (i.e., anyone not Jewish)

Here is one example of "meaningless repetition": **Read 1 Kings 18:26.**

Note that for probably four to six hours they repeated just one phrase: "O Baal, answer us."

I love Elijah's taunt in v27:

"Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or **gone aside**, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened." (emphasis added)

Most translations—especially the older ones—clean this up, even, out of modesty, paraphrase it to death. But the esv bravely translates it correctly: "Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself..." (Lampel paraphrase: "Hey, pray louder! You've caught him in the loo!")

While this refers originally to the mechanical babbling of pagan prayer, Jesus says that He doesn't want His disciples to pray in that way, so their is direct application for us. What are some common "meaningless [or mechanically] repeated" words or phrases Christians use?

YOUR NOTES OR THOUGHTS

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 6:8

"So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."

Psalms 121:1-8

I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; From where shall my help come? My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to slip; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel Will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; The Lord is your shade on your right hand. The sun will not smite you by day, Nor the moon by night. The Lord will protect you from all evil; He will keep your soul. The Lord will guard your going out and your coming in From this time forth and forever.

Matthew 6:9-13

"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]'

Read v8.

Read Psalm 121.

VS9-10: THREE UPWARD PETITIONS

V9: 1ST PETITION: GOD'S NAME

We have traditionally called this "The Lord's Prayer," and that is OK so long as we understand that this is not the prayer the Lord Jesus Himself would pray, but His recommendation of a model prayer for His disciples.

This means it is not intended to be liturgy. Think about the irony of this: Jesus offers this model or template prayer as a counter to meaningless, repetitive babble. Yet in many churches today the "Lord's Prayer" is recited every Sunday like clockwork, as if reciting the words themselves held some magical, mystical quality in worship—which reduces the model prayer to meaningless repetition!

This prayer is, instead, Jesus telling His disciples that their "Father who is in heaven" is a God of order, and that it is good and profitable to include—in one's own words—the following components in their prayers:

Read Matthew 6:9-13.

Pray, then, in this way

Jesus says "Pray, then, *in this way...*" or "*in this manner.*" He does *not* say, "pray these words." This prayer is *how*, not what we should pray.

Our Father who is in heaven

I would encourage you to be thoughtful and specific not just about the content of your prayers, but in how you address them. That is, how you address your heavenly Father should reflect

- the condition of your heart,
- what is *on* your heart to bring to Him.

Depending on what I wish to bring before the throne, I might address my prayer,

- "Heavenly Father,..."
- "Father God,..."
- "Dear Lord,..."

In moments of abject confession and sorrow over sin, I might say,

- "God in heaven,..."
- "Most Holy God,..."

When my heart overflows with worship or praise, I might begin with,

- "Righteous Father,..."
- "Holy God,..."
- "Creator of all that is,..."

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 6:9-13

"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]'

After we establish who it is we are addressing, Jesus tells us that the best *first* thing from our lips is reverent worship.

Hallowed be Your name

hallowed = *hagiazō* = from <G40> (hagios); **to make holy**, i.e. (ceremony) **purify** or **consecrate**; (mentally) to **venerate** :- hallow, be holy, sanctify.

What is holy? His "name"—that is, God's essential being, the fullness of His character, who He is—is holy. Of course we in our prayer are not literally making Him holy, but *acknowledging* His holiness—making Him holy in our aspect.

So our prayers should always acknowledge the majesty, the purity, the untouchable holiness of the One to whom our prayers are directed. This is an acknowledgement of His grace and condescension, for without these we would not even enjoy the privilege of addressing Him in the first place.

I don't want to press this too far, but this clause implies what I call specific worship, as well—which is giving reverence and honor to Father God *for who He is* (as opposed to praise or thanksgiving, which are offered *for what He has done*). Specific worship does not get more pure and direct than calling out to God, "You are holy!"

V10A 2ND PETITION: GOD'S KINGDOM

Your kingdom come.

kingdom = *basileia* = from <G935> (basileus); properly **royalty**, i.e. (abstract) **rule**, or (concrete) a realm (literal or figurative) :- kingdom, + reign.

This refers less to a place, than God's sovereign rule. His kingdom exists already, so the prayer is not that it be initiated, or come about in the first place, but that it has not yet seen its fulfillment.

Carson: That kingdom is breaking in under Christ's ministry, but it is not consummated till the end of the age.

So this petition can be

- a plea for God's kingdom to be *further* established on earth in the here and now, and
- a plea for God's ultimate, finished kingdom to come quickly—i.e., Christ's return to establish the new earth.

At the end of the Revelation written by the apostle John, he writes:

He who testifies to these things says, "**Yes, I am coming quickly.**" Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. (Revelation 22:20)

But I think we can also safely extend this to include the idea that we plead for God to further establish His rule in *us*. And this segues into the third petition.

V10B 3RD PETITION: GOD'S WILL

The KJVS and NASB place a period after "Your kingdom come," whereas the ESV and NIV, place a comma. The latter means that "...on earth as it is in heaven" would apply to both "kingdom" and "will," while the former means that it would apply only to "will."

I could find no declarative evidence for either way, save that most older commentators, who would have been using the KJV, assume the period, and my principle modern commentator ignores it.

Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

will = from the prolonged form of <G2309> (thelo); a **determination** (properly the thing), i.e. (active) **choice** (**special purpose**, decree; abstract volition) or (passive) inclination :- desire, **pleasure**, will.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 6:9-13

"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]'

Luke 11:3

"Give us each day our daily bread."

We could easily spend an entire session on each clause of this prayer, and no less with this one. But let me throw out some possible applications—and I would encourage you to come up with more on your own.

- Lord, I pray that this earth will become more like heaven in my lifetime
- I pray that we would obey your will as completely as those who dwell in your heaven
- Lord, work your will in *me*; change me from an earth-person to a kingdom-person

Implicit in this verse is a heart for and a commitment to those things being petitioned. It is assumed that the one praying these words is making himself available for their implementation—all according the God's will. In other words, absent this motive, the petitioner is just another babbler Jesus speaks against in v7.

Taken as a whole, vs9-10 are a beautiful statement of submission before a sovereign Lord, which is a right and proper beginning to any prayer. Thus I believe the emphasis should be on the pronoun:

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.

Note, by the way, the order of this prayer. We are not to bring our list of needs or wants to the throne without first establishing the sovereignty and holiness of God in our mind.

Worship comes before food.

vs11-13: THREE INWARD PETITIONS

v11: SUSTENANCE

daily = perhaps from the same as <G1966> (epiousa); **to-morrow's**; but more probably from <G1909> (epi) and a derivative of the presumed participle feminine of <G1510> (eimi); for subsistence, i.e. **needful** :- daily.
I.e., *supply for us today the food we will need tomorrow.*

The idea here is further illuminated by Luke's version.

Luke 11:3.

Even in this plea for help there is an attitude of submission.

- The petition is for *needs*, not for *wants*.
- It is not for a lifetime of sustenance, but just for tomorrow. Thus there is an implicit trust in God to meet our needs one day at a time. With that promise, we need not concern ourselves beyond one day. (And Jesus expands on this in vs25-34 of this chapter.)

This, of course, does not mean we sit around waiting for God to show up with a banquet. It means that He is the author not just of our physical well-being, but of our ability and giftedness to put food on our table.

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights... (James 1:17a)

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 6:9-13

"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]'

James 1:13

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

V12: SINS

debts = from (the alternate of) <G3784> (opheilo); **something owed**, i.e. (figurative) a due; **morally a fault** :- debt.

forgive/forgiven = from <G575> (apo) and hiemi (to send; an intensive form of cimi, to go); **to send forth**, in various applications (as follow) :- cry, forsake, **lay aside**, leave, let (alone, be, go, have), omit, put (send) away, remit, yield up; to dismiss, **wipe off**.

Without wandering into the dense weeds about this word translated "debts," we are to take this as synonymous with "sins"—that is, something we "owe" God for the sins we have committed. At the same time, the translation, "trespass" is not acceptable; it was "a mis-translation made common by the *Church of England Prayer Book*." (RWP)

Some read in this (as well as in vs14-15) that we must *earn* God's forgiveness by forgiving others. But this has less to do with actions than *attitude*—the condition of our heart.

John R. W. Stott: Once our eyes have been opened to see the enormity of our offence against God [our "debt"], the injuries which others have done to us appear by comparison extremely trifling. If, on the other hand, we have an exaggerated view of the offense of others, it proves that we have minimized our own.

Robertson's Word Pictures: We ask forgiveness "in proportion as" we also have forgiven those in debt to us, a most solemn reflection.

V13: DELIVERANCE

lead us = from <G1519> (eis) and <G5342> (phero); **to carry inward** (literal or figurative) :- **bring** (in), lead into.

temptation = *peirasmos* = from <G3985> (peirazo); **a putting to proof** (by experiment [of good], experience [of evil], solicitation, discipline or provocation); by implication adversity :- temptation, × **try**.

deliver us = middle of an obsolete verb, akin to <G4482> (rheo) (through the idea of a current; compare <G4511> (rhusis)); **to rush or draw** (for oneself), i.e. **rescue** :- deliver (-er).

evil^{NASB,KJV}, **evil one**^{NIV,NKJV} = *poneros* = from a derivative of <G4192> (ponos); hurtful, i.e. **evil** (properly in effect or influence, and thus differing from <G2556> (kakos), which refers rather to essential character, as well as from <G4550> (sapos), which indicates degeneracy from original virtue); figurative calamitous; also (passive) ill, i.e. diseased; but especially (morally) culpable, i.e. **derelict, vicious**, facinorous; neuter (singular) mischief, malice, or (plural) guilt; masculine (singular) the devil, or (plural) sinners :- bad, evil, grievous, harm, lewd, malicious, wicked (-ness). See also <G4191> (ponerotos).

Read James 1:13.

Carson: The word *peirasmos* ("temptation") and its cognate noun rarely if ever before the NT mean "temptation" in the sense of "enticement to sin," but rather "testing." But testing can have various purposes (e.g., refinement, ascertaining the strength of character, enticement to sin) and diverse results (greater purity, self-confidence, growth in faith, sin); and as a result the word can slide over into the entirely negative sense of "temptation." The word sustains the unambiguous meaning in **James 1:13-14**. In this light *peirasmos* cannot easily mean "temptation" in Matthew 6:13; for that would be to pray God would not do what in fact He cannot do, akin to praying that God would not sin.

But if *peirasmos* in v13 means "testing," we face another problem. The NT everywhere insists that believers will face testings or trials of many kinds but that they should be faced with joy. If this be so, to pray for grace and

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 6:14-15

"For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."

endurance in trial is understandable; but to pray not to be brought to testings is strange.

It may be that we are forcing this sixth petition into too rigid a mold. The NT tells us that this age will be characterized by wars and rumors of wars but does not find it incongruous to urge us to pray for those in authority so "we may live peaceful and quiet lives" (1 Timothy 2:2). While Jesus told His disciples to rejoice when persecuted (5:10-12) He nevertheless exhorted them to flee from it (10:23) and even to pray that their flight should not be too severe (24:20). Similarly, a prayer requesting to be spared testings may not be incongruous when placed beside exhortations to consider such testings, when they come, as pure joy.

...deliver us from evil

The translation, "evil one," is preferred.

vs14-15

The formal prayer has concluded, but Jesus returns to this business of forgiveness.

Read vs14-15.

The consensus is that vs 14 & 15 are just a retelling and expansion of v12, but I confess that initially I was not comfortable with that. I found some help with this, however, from Wayne Grudem:

Jesus says, "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14 – 15). Similarly, Jesus says, "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11:25). Our Lord does not have in mind the initial experience of forgiveness we know when we are justified by faith, for that would not belong in a prayer that we pray every day (see Matt. 6:12 with vv. 14 – 15). He refers rather to the *day-by-day relationship with God* that we need to have restored when we have sinned and displeased him. In fact, Jesus commands us to build into our prayers a request that God forgive us in the same way that we have forgiven others who have harmed us (in the same "personal relationship" sense of "forgive"—that is, not holding a grudge or cherishing bitterness against another person or harboring any desire to harm them): "Forgive us our sins, *as we also have forgiven those who sin against us*" (Matt. 6:12, author's translation). If there are those whom we have not forgiven when we pray this prayer, then we are asking God not to restore a right relationship with us after we sin, in just the same way as we have refused to do so with others. Since prayer presumes a relationship with God as a person, this is not surprising. If we have sinned against him and grieved the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph. 4:30), and the sin has not been forgiven, it interrupts our relationship with God (cf. Isa. 59:1 – 2). Until sin is forgiven and the relationship is restored prayer will, of course, be difficult. Moreover, if we have unforgiveness in our hearts against someone else, then we are not acting in a way that is pleasing to God or helpful to us. So God declares (Matt. 6:12, 14 – 15) that he will distance himself from us until we forgive others. (from his *Systematic Theology*, page 386)

James 1:5-8

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

James 4:4

You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Matthew 6:19-20

"Do not 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 do not break in or steal..."

James 4:13-14

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

SESSION 12: TRYING TO HAVE IT BOTH WAYS

Matthew 6:19-24

At first glance this passage would seem to address three separate situations. But when you dig deeper you discover that there is a common thread here; Jesus is really making one salient point.

James, the brother of Jesus, had something to say about trust and faith.

Read James 1:5-8.

When we do not have faith, but instead, doubt, we reveal ourselves to be double-minded, "driven and tossed by the wind" like a wave of the sea. We are someone who has no solid footing, but just gets tossed about willy-nilly, trusting first in this, then in that.

James puts it in even stronger terms in chapter four.

Read James 4:4.

We can't have it both ways. Either we place our trust in the things of this world, or we place our trust in God. Our Creator will not permit us to do both. We must choose.

Hold your place in James 4, for just a moment, as we go to Matthew 6.

VS19-21: TREASURE

Read v19-20.

v19 begins with the verb form and noun form of the same word:

store up^{NASB,NIV}, **lay up**^{KJVS} = *thesaurizo* = from <G2344> (thesauros); **to amass or reserve** (literal or figurative) :- lay up (treasure), (keep) in store, (heap) **treasure** (together, up).

treasures = *thesaurus* = from <G5087> (tithemi); **a deposit, i.e. wealth** (literal or figurative) :- treasure.

So we could say, "Do not treasure treasure." (which is how YLT has it: "Treasure not up to yourselves treasures on earth...") Considering the verb tense, best rendition would be "Stop treasuring your treasures!" (the verb tense implies that it is already happening)

rust = from the base of <G977> (bibrosko); (abstract) **eating (literal or figurative)**; by extensive (concrete) food (literal or figurative) :- eating, food, meat.

destroy = *aphanizo* = from <G852> (aphanes); **to render unapparent, i.e. (active) consume** (becloud), or (passive) disappear (be destroyed) :- **corrupt, disfigure, perish, vanish away.**

Read James 4:13-14.

break in/through = the kjv is closest. Literally "**dig through**." Easy to do through the mud walls or sun-dried bricks of a first century dwelling. (The Greeks called a burglar a "mud-digger.")

Our very *life* on this earth is just "a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away." So what does that say about our belongings, our things?

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Luke 12:33

“Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys.”

Matthew 6:21

“...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Matthew 6:22

“The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.”

Proverbs 10:8–9

The wise of heart will receive commands, But a babbling fool will be ruined. He who walks in integrity walks securely, But he who perverts his ways will be found out.

James 1:5

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

But since UPS does not deliver to heaven, so we can't very well ship our boxes there, Jesus must be speaking about more than just tangible objects. I love what Adam Clarke has to say about this—specifically acts of charity. He first quotes Pasquier Quesnel, a French Theologian of the 18th century:

“The only way to render perishing goods eternal, to secure stately furniture from moths, and the richest metals from canker, and precious stones from thieves, is to transmit them to heaven by acts of charity. This is a kind of bill of exchange which cannot fail of acceptance, but through our own fault.”

Then Clarke adds:

It is certain we have not the smallest portion of temporal good, but what we have received from the unmerited bounty of God: and if we give back to him all we have received, yet still there is no merit that can fairly attach to the act, as the goods were the Lord's; for I am not to suppose that I can purchase any thing from a man by his own property. On this ground the doctrine of human merit is one of the most absurd that ever was published among men, or credited by sinners. Yet he who supposes he can purchase heaven by giving that meat which was left at his own table, and that of his servants; or by giving a garment which he could no longer in decency wear, must have a base ignorant soul, and a very mean opinion of the heaven he hopes for. But shall not such works as these be rewarded? Yes, yes, God will take care to give you all that your refuse victuals and old clothes are worth. Yet he, who through love to God and man, divides his bread with the hungry, and covers the naked with a garment, shall not lose his reward; a reward which the mercy of God appoints, but to which, in strict justice, he can lay no claim.

It has been my experience that those who speak the most about how little they care about money, are actually the ones most preoccupied with it. Those who are the most proud of how little they have, are really most envious of those who have more than them.

Yes, on one level this teaching is about money and objects and acts of charity. In another of His teaching moments in Luke 12—not parallel to the Sermon on the Mount in Luke 6, but parallel to this passage—Jesus is even more explicit about this.

Read Luke 12:33.

But I believe Jesus is also speaking of something less tangible. V34 in Luke is identical to v21 in Matthew 6.

Read v21.

Once again, as He has from the beginning of this sermon, Jesus drills right down to the condition of our *heart*. He cares less about the size of your bank account, or how much you give to charity, than where your *heart* is.

What is most important to you—the things of this earth or things above? What do you love?

vs22–23: LIGHT

Then Jesus comes at it from another direction.

Read v22.

clear^{NASB}, **good**^{NKJV,NIV}, **single**^{KJV} = *haplous* (hap-looce') = probably from <G1> (a) (as a particle of union) and the base of <G4120> (pleko); properly **folded together, i.e. single (figurative clear)** :- single; healthy, **sincere**.

OT: unambiguous, clear; describes the wise man who accepts the commandments whole-heartedly—i.e., his walk has clear direction.

Read Proverbs 10:8–9.

NT: personal wholeness, undividedness—i.e., uncomplicated simplicity.

Read James 1:5. (“generously”—i.e., without ulterior motive (“clearly”))

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 6:23

“But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”

Matthew 6:24

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

1 Kings 18:17–21

When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, “Is this you, you troubler of Israel?” He said, “I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and you have followed the Baals. Now then send and gather to me all Israel at Mount Carmel, together with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.” So Ahab sent a message among all the sons of Israel and brought the prophets together at Mount Carmel. Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” But the people did not answer him a word.

full of light = *photeinos* (fo-tee-nahs’) = from <G5457> (phos); **lustrous, i.e. transparent or well-illuminated** (figurative) :- bright, full of light.

Read v23.

bad = *poneros*’ = [most often translated “evil”] from a derivative of <G4192> (ponos); hurtful, i.e. **evil** (properly in effect or influence, and thus differing from <G2556> (kakos), which refers rather to essential character, as well as from <G4550> (sapos), which indicates degeneracy from original virtue); figurative calamitous; also (passive) ill, i.e. **diseased**; but especially (morally) culpable, i.e. **derelict**, vicious, facinorous; neuter (singular) mischief, malice, or (plural) guilt; masculine (singular) the devil, or (plural) sinners :- bad, evil, grievous, harm, lewd, malicious, wicked (-ness). See also <G4191> (poneroterōs).

OT: the “evil eye” can refer to miserliness and selfishness.

full of darkness = from <G4655> (skotos); **opaque**, i.e. (figurative) benighted :- dark, full of darkness.

If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

light = *phos* (fōse) = from an obsolete phao (to shine or make manifest, especially by rays; compare <G5316> (phaino), <G5346> (phemi)); **luminousness** (in the widest application, natural or artificial, abstract or concrete, literal or figurative) :- fire light.

darkness = *skotos* (skah’-tahs) = from the base of <G4639> (skia); **shadiness**, i.e. **obscurity** (literal or figurative) :- darkness.

TWO INTERPRETATIONS

D. A. Carson: Jesus is...saying either (1) that the man who “divides his interest and tries to focus both on God and possessions...has no clear vision, and will live without clear orientation or direction” (Filson)—an interpretation nicely compatible with v24, below; or (2) that the man who is stingy and selfish cannot really see where he is going; he is morally and spiritually blind—an interpretation compatible with vs19–21, above.

v24: SLAVERY

Read v24a.

serve = *douleuo* (dool-yoo-o) = from <G1401> (doulos); **to be a slave to** (literal or figurative, involuntary or voluntary) :- **be in bondage**, (do) serve (-ice).

hate = *miseo* = from a primary misos (hatred); **to detest** (especially to persecute); by extension to love less :- hate (-ful).

love = *agapao* = perhaps from agan (much) [or compare <H5689> (‘agab)]; to love (in a social or moral sense) :- (be-) love (-ed). Compare <G5368> (phileo).

devoted, loyal^{NKJV}, **hold to**^{KJV} = from <G473> (anti) and the middle of <G2192> (echo); **to hold oneself opposite to, i.e. (by implication) adhere to**; by extension to care for :- hold fast, hold to, support.

despise = *kataphroneo* = from <G2596> (kata) and <G5426> (phroneo); **to think against, i.e. disesteem** :- despise.

Let’s revisit the story about Elijah we looked at in our previous session.

Read 1 Kings 18:17–21.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 6:24

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

How long will you hesitate between two opinions?

hesitate^{NASB}, **falter**^{NKJV}, **halt**^{KJV}, **waver**^{NIV} = *pasach* = to limp; literally, “limp on the two divided opinions”—i.e., not have a firm footing on either.

Lampel paraphrase: *How long will you insist on having it both ways? You want to love God while you love everything that stands against Him! If Jehovah-adonai is the one true God, then you must follow Him. If this Baal creature is the one true God, then you must follow Him. But you cannot follow both!*

And Jesus puts the final stamp on this as he finishes v24:

Read v24b.

You cannot...

It can't be done. Don't even try.

...serve God and wealth.

wealth^{NASB}, **mammon**^{KJVS}, **money**^{NIV} = *mamonas* = of Chaldian origin (confidence, i.e. figurative wealth, personified); *mammonas*, i.e. avarice (deified)
:- *mammon*; *mamona*, Gr for Aramaic *mammon*; i.e. **wealth, etc,**
personified as an object of worship.

The root of this word means “that in which one trusts or has confidence.” Remember our context here: not employee/employer, but slave/master. Since one can have more than one job, one can have more than one employer. But a slave can have only one *master*.

Will you place your trust in the false gods of this world—money, prestige, objects, notoriety—or will you place your trust in the one true God—the Lord of heaven? Will you store up all your wealth in the rusting warehouses on earth, or will you invest it in the Bank of Heaven? Will you keep your eyes open to the light that shines down from above, thus illuminating your life with heavenly light, or will you live in darkness?

Will you place your confidence in things that are fading away, or in things that are eternal?

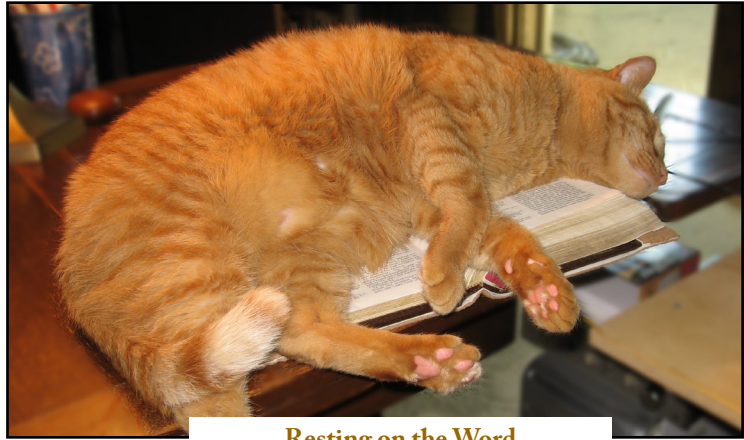
You can't have it both ways. You must choose.

Which will it be?

SESSION 13: MORE THAN LIFE

Matthew 6:25-27 (33)

I present for your consideration... Merlin and Morgan. Brother and sister, to the unfamiliar eye they look enough alike that when we first met them they wore colored collars—blue for the boy, pink for the girl—to help identify them.



Resting on the Word



In personality, however, they are as different as night and day. Merlin, the boy, is perfectly content with whatever befalls him. He is easy-going, forgiving, and slow to react. When Baker, our outside boy, ambles by on the opposite side of the library window, Merlin barely raises his head in acknowledgement, and simply gazes at his outdoor brother with detached bemusement.

In contrast, his sister, Morgan, is a worrier, always fussing and fretting about every little thing. Whenever Baker comes by to say hello, she throws herself against the glass, hissing and spitting and growling, foaming at the mouth with righteous indignation. When Baker continues on, around the house toward the workshop, Morgan races in there to keep an eye on him through *that* window.

When the place mat is put down for their meals, Merlin calmly sits waiting, gazing at the empty mat where he knows his bowl of food will momentarily appear. At the same moment Morgan, however, still peers upward with concern in her eyes toward the one setting the table: “Is it coming? Is it coming?”

Morgan is a classic worrier, and a poster child for this, our last passage in chapter six—in which the Lord continues His treatise on the wrong way and the right way to conduct our lives.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 6:24

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

Matthew 6:25

"For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"

v25: THERE IS MORE TO LIFE THAN SUSTENANCE AND APPAREL

For this reason... (Therefore...)

For *what* reason? Every time we encounter a "therefore" in Scripture, it always raises the question: *To what does it refer? How far back do we need to go?* And in this instance I believe we just go back to the previous verse, v24.

Jesus closed His previous point by declaring that it is impossible to be the slave of two masters.

Read v24.

His closing line is "You cannot serve God and wealth" or *mammon*. He says we must choose: *Will you pursue wealth and the things of this world—thus being a slave to them—or will you let Me be your master?* And the passage before us fleshes out the point that if we choose the latter, we need not concern ourselves with the former. Why worry about the piddling things of this world when the Lord God is your Master?

Read v25.

Do not be worried about ...

The *κ**jv* "Take no thought for your life..." was appropriate when first written, but is easily misinterpreted now. We would read that, "Give no thought at all," but to those reading it in the 17th century it would have meant "Do not have "solicitous anxiety" (Maclaren) for your life—which is why in the *κ**jv* and *nasb* it is rendered, "...do not **worry** about your life...". Perhaps the *esv* has it best: "...do not be **anxious** about your life..."

life = *psyche* (soo-khay') = from <G5594> (psucho); **breath, i.e. (by implication) spirit**, abstract or concrete (**the animal sentient principle only**; thus distinguished on the one hand from <G4151> (pneuma), which is the rational and immortal soul; and on the other from <G2222> (zoe), which is mere vitality, even of plants: these terms thus exactly correspond respectively to the Hebrew <H5315> (nephesh) ↓, <H7307> (ruwach) and <H2416> (chay)) :- heart (+ -ily), life, mind, **soul**, + us, + you.

nephesh = from <H5314> (naphash); properly **a breathing creature, i.e. animal or (abstract) vitality; used very widely in a literal, accommodated or figurative sense (bodily or mental)** :- any, appetite, beast, body, breath, creature, × dead (-ly), desire, × [dis-] contented, × fish, ghost, + greedy, he, heart (-y), (hath, × jeopardy of) life (× in jeopardy), lust, man, me, mind, mortally, one, own, person, pleasure, (her-, him-, my-, thy-) self, them (your) -selves, + slay, soul, + tablet, they, thing, (× she) will, × would have it.

Brown: *psyche* embraces the whole natural being and life of man for which he concerns himself and of which he takes constant care. *psyche* [also] means the inner life of man, equivalent to the ego, person, or personality, with the various powers of the soul.

body = *soma* = from <G4982> (sozo); **the body (as a sound whole)**, used in a very wide application, literal or figurative :- bodily, body, slave.

put on = *endyo* (en-doo'-o = from <G1722> (en) and <G1416> (duno) (**in the sense of sinking into a garment**); to invest with clothing (literal or figurative) :- array, clothe (with), endue, have (put) on; **to cloth or be clothed with**.

McNeile: "Here *psuche* stands for the life principle common to man and beast, which is embodied in the *soma*: the former needs food, the latter clothing"

So Jesus is specifically addressing the internal and the external—covering both bases. Food and drink are for the internal, the essence of life that requires fuel, (*psyche*), and clothing is for the external, the physical body (*soma*).

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 6:26

“Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?”

Job 38:39-41

“Can you hunt the prey for the lion, Or satisfy the appetite of the young lions, When they crouch in their dens And lie in wait in their lair? Who prepares for the raven its nourishment When its young cry to God And wander about without food?”

Job 39:26-29

“Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars, Stretching his wings toward the south? Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up And makes his nest on high? On the cliff he dwells and lodges, Upon the rocky crag, an inaccessible place. From there he spies out food; His eyes see it from afar.”

Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Jesus’ question is obviously rhetorical, but just because we know the correct answer is “yes,” that doesn’t mean we should stop there. This is good food for thought. On your own, in your prayer closet, consider...

- What does my *psyche*, my internal life consist of?
- If my true, essential life is not food, what is it? What does it consist of? What does it look like?
- If my true external life is not clothing, what is it? What does it consist of? What does it look like?
- Here is another way to come at it: Does my life have a healthy balance between the physical and the spiritual? Am I so busy *doing* that I have forgotten I have a Master who takes care of me?

v26

Jesus illustrates His principle in v26 using birds.

Read v26.

A few observations:

- Jesus *really* wants us to consider this:
look at = from <G1722> (en) and <G991> (blepo); to look on, i.e. (relative) **to observe fixedly**, or (absolute) **to discern clearly** :- behold, gaze up, look upon, (could) see.
- God is *our* “heavenly father”—not birds’
- The “you” in the last sentence is emphatic

Here is a good answer for those who interpret this passage as meaning we are to just sit around eating *bons bons*, waiting for God to do everything for us. Jesus tells us to carefully observe the behavior of birds: They may not sow or reap or gather into barns, but they also are not sitting on their hands. Birds spend about 99% of their time looking for food, eating food, building nests, etc. They are almost constantly busy doing whatever is necessary to survive.

Jesus says “your heavenly Father feeds them”—which, first, means that He

- knows about them
- to some extent cares about their welfare
- and sees to their “nourishment”

This does not mean that they point their faces skyward and Father God drops food into their mouths. I take this to mean that in the economy of God’s creation He ordered the natural world in such a way that every species—down to the most insignificant sparrow—would have something to eat. Just as with humans, some birds get fat, some die of starvation; some live where food is plentiful, some live where it requires constant searching; some birds grow old and die naturally, some are eaten the moment they leave the nest. The Father may not deliver three square meals per day to their doorstep, but He has created a world in which they can live and thrive.

Read the words of God in Job 38:39-41; 39:26-29.

Are you not worth much more than they?

In spite of the lavish attention He shows to the natural world, Jesus tells us that God the Father considers us—man, mankind, human beings—“worth much more.” Not just more, but *much* more.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Philippians 1:9-10

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;

Matthew 6:27

"And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?"

worth...more = *diaphero* = from <G1223> (dia) and <G5342> (phero); to bear through, i.e. (literal) transport; usually to bear apart, i.e. (objective) to toss about (figurative report); subject to **"differ," or (by implication) surpass** :- be better, carry, differ from, drive up and down, be (more) excellent, make matter, publish, **be of more value**.

worth **much** more = *mallon* = neuter of the comparative of the same as <G3122> (malista); (adverb) **more (in a greater degree)** or rather :- + better, × far, (the) more (and more), (so) much (the more), rather.

Read Philippians 1:9-10.

Note "more and more" = *mallon*; "excellent" = *diaphero*

v27

Read v27.

It is always easier to recognize futile worry in others than in ourselves. My mom was another classic worrier, and even as a young boy I recognized this and concluded, *What's the point? Mom, your worry, doesn't affect the outcome one bit!*

It doesn't for anyone. Morgan's fretting over that big gray cat outside the window changes nothing—except, perhaps, Baker's amusement over getting her goat. Her worrying over the bowl of food gets it there no sooner. She gets fed at precisely the same time as her brother who worries about it not one bit.

In v27 Jesus asks, essentially, *What's the point of it all? Worry doesn't change a thing*. But the words he chooses are interesting. Even within the different versions these words are translated in various ways, so it is not surprising that we have a difference between the NASB and NIV, and the KJVS.

hour^{NASB,NIV}, **cubit**^{KJVS} = of uncertain affinity; **the fore-arm**, i.e. (as a measure) a cubit :- cubit.

life^{NASB,NIV}, **stature**^{KJVS} = from the same as <G2245> (helikos); **maturity** (in years or size) :- **age**, stature.

In ancient times, the "natural" cubit was the distance from a man's elbow to finger tip; the more precise cubit used for construction was about eighteen inches—i.e., a linear measurement. But this same word is translated "life," "life-span," and "yards" in the NASB, and the word translated "life" in the NASB and "stature" in the KJVS is also translated "age" in the KJVS (John 9 and Hebrews 11). Even D. A. Carson in his commentary gets the Greek words mixed up and switched around.

So, since we cannot add inches to our life-span, or hours to our height, perhaps the best way to interpret this is that Jesus was speaking metaphorically. Carson suggests that the Revised Standard Version's "add one cubit to his span of life" is akin to our saying that at our birthday we have "passed a milepost."

Even so, I think we get the gist of it: Worry doesn't add anything to anything—except perhaps lines in the face. Worry just makes us more miserable for however long we have on this earth.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 6:33

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Nehemiah 1:1-6a

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol, that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire." When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. I said, "I beseech You, O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants..."

Nehemiah 2:1-4

And it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine was before him, and I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart." Then I was very much afraid. I said to the king, "Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?" Then the king said to me, "What would you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven.

v33

I want to close by taking just a quick look at v33—which we will examine in greater detail in our next session.

The heading for this section in the NASB is "The Cure for Anxiety," but one does not find that cure until v33.

Read v33.

This verse reminds me of the quote by C. S. Lewis I have used before:

C. S. Lewis: Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in; aim at earth and you will get neither.

It also reminds me of Nehemiah, whose instinctive first move when faced with a challenging situation was to pray.

Read Nehemiah 1:1-6a

Read Nehemiah 2:1-4.

Whenever Nehemiah needed something, he first went to his God in prayer. And out of that prayer came the answer.

No matter what we are doing, no matter what we are looking for, no matter what perplexes us, when we *start* with God and His kingdom and His righteousness, we have nothing at all to worry about.

That is the "Cure for Anxiety."

Matthew 5:1-2

When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying...

SESSION 14: SUFFICIENT UNTO THE DAY

Matthew 6:28-33

Let's return for just a moment to the beginning of this discourse we refer to as the Sermon on the Mount.

Read Matthew 5:1-2.

Week after week, as we burrow into the priceless instruction and truths Jesus gave to His disciples, it is easy to forget its setting. See it in your mind... Jesus is walking along with His disciples; it is a pleasant day, the sun is shining. Trailing along behind them is a large crowd of the curious and intrigued—both those hungry for what this rabbi has to offer, and those eager to entrap Him by His own words.

At some point along the way, Jesus takes note of all the people following after them and thinks to Himself, "It is a good time for me to share these truths with the people." Rising before them is a large hill. Midway up is a level place with a large stone—a perfect setting for the teacher to offer an extended lesson.

As He climbs up to His "pulpit," His immediate disciples follow closely as the people scatter across the gentle slope. Reaching the level area, Jesus turns out toward the valley below and sits down on the stone. Sensing their Master is about to teach them at length, the disciples draw nearer and take their ease in a rough semi-circle at His feet.

The Lord looks out over the people and, after a few moments thought, He begins with a blessing. Uppermost in His mind, pushing forward ahead of everything else is His love, His compassion for the people. He cares about them, and it is a love rooted in the harsh reality of their lives—not just their lives at the moment, but what He knows awaits them if they commit to following Him. So His blessing is not just some flowery prose, some vacuous feel-good platitudes meant to warm up the crowd, but blessings that mirror the nitty-gritty of faith.

After the blessings, perhaps Jesus pauses to let the brand new thoughts sink in. That, too, shows His compassion and kindness. He does not berate the people; He does not lecture, but gently leads, as a shepherd tending His sheep. As He pauses, Jesus looks around at the beauty and intricacies of His own creation, and He uses the familiar imagery of the natural world to illustrate His points:

"You are the salt of the earth..."

"You are the light of the world..."

Jesus begins with what they know, what they have heard their entire lives, and with that as a starting point, He leads them into a new direction:

"You have heard that it was said..."

"But I say to you..."

Then Jesus launches into a treatise on being real, again drawing upon those things, those people familiar to them—telling them to live out their faith in honesty, from their heart, instead of for show. And then, after speaking about the errant conduct of their leaders, He comes back to the sometimes harsh reality of their daily lives—and He once again draws on the imagery of nature to make His point.

Perhaps the crowd is stirring, wondering where they might find something to eat. From where He sits, Jesus may hear their stomachs growling. In v25 of chapter 6 Jesus says:

"...do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink..."

He then sees the birds circling overhead and he uses them to illustrate:

"Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them."

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 6:25b-29

"...Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.

Matthew 6:30

"But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!"

James 1:9-11

But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

SIDEBAR

I would encourage you to cultivate this in your own reading of the Bible. We nod our heads and agree that the words and events in God's word really happened, and are really true. We accept them as literal truth. But I fear that all too often we then read those words and read about those events as if they were cranked out by a machine: lifeless, cold, plastic.

Make an effort, when you are reading God's word on your own, to see in your mind the setting, the *reality* of the moment. These were real people, doing and saying real things while living out very real lives.

v28-29

And so, as we dig in this session Jesus continues along the same line in v28. And if you will permit me, I favor the following interpretation:

Read v25b-29. (v28: "And [, by the way,] why *are* you worried about clothing?")

worried = *merimnao* = from <G3308> (merimna); **to be anxious about** :- (be, have) care (-ful), take thought.

Perhaps at this point the Lord glances over to a grassy area nearby and sees some wildflowers dotting the landscape. So again He uses something from the natural world to illustrate His point. But this time there is a small difference: Whereas the birds do *something* to feed themselves, flowers don't do anything at all to clothe themselves.

The word translated "observe" in the NASB has similar intensity to "Look at" in v26, but is a different Greek word.

observe^{NASB}, **consider**^{KJVS} = from <G2596> (kata) and <G3129> (manthano); **to learn thoroughly**, i.e. (by implication) **to note carefully** :- consider.

So just as with His reference to the "birds of the air," Jesus wants them to *really study* the "lilies of the field." Unlike the birds, however, they do not "toil" or "spin" at all.

lily = not just that species, but any type of wildflower, such as anemones, poppies, gladioli, irises; specifically *wild* flowers ("of the field")—those utterly unattended by man.

toil = lit., they do not feel fatigue from working hard

By using "toil" and "spin" Jesus covers both sexes and their respective parts in the manufacture of clothing. The men would plant and harvest the flax, and the women would card and spin the flax into linen for clothing.

clothed himself^{NASB}, **arrayed**^{KJVS} = *periballo* = from <G4012> (peri) and <G906> (ballo); **to throw all around, i.e. invest** (with a palisade or with clothing) :- array, cast about, **clothe** (-d me), **put on**.

v30

Read v30.

He uses the imagery for a different purpose, but James gives us a fuller picture of the fleeting beauty of the grass and the lilies of the field.

Read James 1:9-11.

clothes = from the base of <G297> (amphoterōs) and hennumi (**to invest**); **to enrobe** :- clothe.

grass = apparently a primary word; a "court" or "garden", i.e. (by implication of pasture) herbaceous vegetation :- blade, grass, hay.

furnace = of uncertain derivative; **an earthen pot used for baking** in :- oven.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 6:31

"Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'"

Matthew 6:32

"For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things."

Matthew 6:33

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Shortly before we officially moved into our present house, I walked through the front field that slopes down to the road, and I picked various grasses and wildflowers I discovered there to bring back to show Linda what was growing naturally on our property. It revealed a marvelous, detailed microcosm—mostly unseen unless one takes the time to stop and take a closer look.

We see an open field, and depending on the season, There may be lush grasses waving in the breeze. It may be dotted with lovely wildflowers that add accents of color to the green of the grass. The field may be a tapestry of golds and burnt umber as autumn dries what is there. Or the weeds may be coated in the magic of hoar frost on a cold winter morn.

Jesus is shaking us by the shoulders and saying, *Look around you! If Father God takes such an interest in wild grasses and flowers, detailing them with such varied and resplendent beauty, what makes you think He won't do that much and more for you, His chosen ones, His children? Why is your faith so small?*

v31

In v31 Jesus reiterates His theme—introduced in v25.

Read v31.

v32

And then He proceeds to get *really* rude by comparing people who behave this way to heathens who do not even know God.

Read v32.

He says that they

seek^{NASB,KJVS}, **run after**^{NIV} = from <G1909> (epi) and <G2212> (zeteo); to search (inquire) for; **intensive to demand, to crave** :- **desire**, enquire, **seek** (**after**, for).

v33

As noted last week, we have to wait for v33 to discover the answer to the heading the NASB gives this section: "The Cure for Anxiety."

Read v33.

Here is the nut buried inside; here is what Jesus was getting at all along. The answer to anxiety, worry, fretting? Seek *first* God's kingdom and His righteousness.

This word translated "seek" is the root from which the earlier "seek" (in v32; *epizeteo*) is derived:

seek = *zeteo* = of uncertain affinity; to seek (literal or figurative); specially (by Hebrew) **to worship (God)**, or (in a bad sense) to plot (against life) :- be (go) about, desire, **endeavour**, enquire (for), require, (× will) seek (after, for, means). Compare <G4441> (punthanomai).

seek **first** = *protos* = contracted superlative of <G4253> (pro); **foremost (in time, place, order or importance)** :- before, beginning, best, chief (-est), first (of all), former.

This can mean *first before* anything else, and *first as more important* than anything else.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Luke 18:28-30

Peter said, "Behold, we have left our own homes and followed You." And He said to them, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life."

Psalms 37:1-6

Do not fret because of evildoers, Be not envious toward wrongdoers. For they will wither quickly like the grass And fade like the green herb. Trust in the Lord and do good; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord; And He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, and He will do it. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light And your judgment as the noonday.

Matthew 6:34

"So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

YOUR NOTES OR THOUGHTS

Discussion: Put into your own words what it means to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness."

Hans-Georg Link, in Brown: "deliberate striving and desiring," "to put their whole life at the disposal of God's will and rule"

Read Luke 18:28-30.

It is important that we understand this. If we have been in the habit of worry and anxiety we are probably also in the habit of trying to work things out for ourselves. And so our response to this passage may be to

- grit our teeth and *stop worrying*;
- develop a ten-step program to remove anxiety from our life;
- give permission to a friend to kick us every time he catches us worrying about something.

But that isn't what Jesus is saying at all. And I believe this is the answer for *every* part of our life—*every* area in which we miss the mark: We do not overcome darkness by engaging it; we overcome darkness by living in the Light. We do not begin with effort; we begin with obedience and discipleship in His kingdom.

Read Psalm 37:1-6.

If you commit yourself to Me and My kingdom, do you think I won't take care of you, take care of your needs?

added = from <G4314> (pros) and <G5087> (tithemi); **to place additionally, i.e. lay beside**, annex, repeat; again, give more, increase, lay unto, proceed further, speak to any more.

v34

Read v34.

Jesus finishes this passage with a sense of humor. He says, don't worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will worry about itself. I don't know why the NASB translates this "care"; it is the same word that has been translated "worry" throughout this passage.

There is nothing wrong at all with the kjvs of this sentence. It's just a little hard to understand.

trouble = *kakia* = from <G2556> (kakos); **badness**, i.e. (subject) **depravity**, or (active) **malignity**, or (passive) trouble :- **evil**, malice (-iousness), naughtiness, wickedness.

That which is evil from man's point of view; once applied to crop damage caused by hail. (Carson)

Do you remember what we discussed about the line “Give us this day our daily bread” in the disciple’s prayer? That prayer does not ask for a month’s worth of food, nor a week’s worth—not even two day’s worth, but just enough for the “this day.”

D. A. Carson: [Jesus] is implicitly teaching that even for His disciples, today’s grace is sufficient only for today and should not be wasted on tomorrow. If tomorrow does bring new trouble, there will be new grace to meet it.

So, in a sense, there is something poetic about the kjvs of this last sentence. “Sufficient for the day is its own trouble”—*because sufficient for the day is God’s ever-renewing grace!*

Matthew 7:1

"Do not judge so that you will not be judged."

Matthew 6:5,7

"When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

"And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words."

Matthew 7:6

"Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces."

Matthew 7:15-16a

"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits."

1 John 4:1-3

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

Matthew 7:1-6

We now begin the third and final chapter in Christ's Sermon on the Mount: Chapter 7.

v1

Jesus states His principle in a clean succinct manner in v1.

Read v1.

The word translated "judge" and "judged" in vs1 & 2 is a flexible word used in a variety of ways (114 times in the NASB) throughout the NT. So we must have a clear understanding of how Jesus uses it in *this* context.

judge/judged = *krino* = properly **to distinguish, i.e. decide (mentally or judicially)**; by implication to try, condemn, punish :- avenge, conclude, condemn, damn, decree, determine, esteem, judge, go to (sue at the) law, ordain, call in question, sentence to, think. Our word "critic" is from this word.

Some have taken this to mean that we are not to make *any* conclusions or determinations about anyone, but just putting into practice the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount requires a measure of judgment on our part—e.g.,

- **Read Matthew 6:5,7** (hypocrites and Gentiles) .
- **Read Matthew 7:6** (dogs and swine)
- **Read Matthew 7:15-16a** (false prophets)

To these we could add John's command to test the spirits.

Read 1 John 4:1-3.

A certain measure of judgment is required to do this. No, Jesus is saying here, instead, that we are not to be *judgmental*—censorious: inclined to find fault; harshly critical.

Adam Clarke: These exhortations are pointed against rash, harsh, and uncharitable judgments, the thinking evil where no evil seems, and speaking of it accordingly. This is one of the most important exhortations in the whole of this excellent sermon. **By a secret and criminal disposition of nature, man endeavors to elevate himself above others, and, to do it more effectually, depresses them. His jealous and envious heart wishes that there may be no good quality found but in himself, that he alone may be esteemed.** Such is the state of every unconverted man; and it is from this criminal disposition, that evil surmises, rash judgments, precipitate decisions, and all other unjust procedures against our neighbor, flow. (emphasis added)

I disagree, however, with D. A. Carson, who states

Those who "judge" like this will in turn be "judged," not by men (which would be of little consequence), but by God (which fits the solemn tone of the discourse).

Certainly this verse does indeed refer to the judgment of God—not in the sense of in or out (of heaven), but in the sense of correction, chastisement—but it need not be limited to that. Who in our society receives more withering judgment than the person who insists on judging others? And I do not agree that it is of little consequence—ultimately, eternally: no; but in our day-by-day walk with fellow disciples: very consequential indeed. It sets up a vicious cycle that can inflict great harm on the body of Christ.

So right off the bat, with the first three words of this chapter we must turn the lens around to examine ourselves—our own behavior, motives, our own heart. *Am I judgmental? Does this describe me?*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 7:2

“For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.”

The full flower of this (and the next) verse is that when we do this we are playing God—which Carson emphasizes, citing several Talmudic texts:

“Do not assume the place of God by deciding you have the right to stand in judgment over all—do not do it, I say, in order to avoid being called to account by the God whose place you usurp.”

v2

Jesus expands v1 in v2.

Read v2.

As is so often the case, it seems, the KJVS are more literal, but the NASB and NIV are more understandable. The play on words in this verse—along with the fact that Jesus re-uses it in another setting (in Mark 4:24)—suggests that it is a proverbial saying. That interplay is more obvious in the KJVS.

the **way** you judge^{NASB}, what **judgment** you judge^{KJVS} = *krima* = from <G2919> (krino); a decision (the function or the effect, for or against [“crime”]) :- avenge, condemned, condemnation, damnation, + go to law, judgment.

your **standard** of measure^{NASB}, the **measure** you use/**mete**^{KJVS} = *metron* (noun) = an apparently primary word; a **measure** (“**metre**”), literal or figurative; by implication a limited portion (degree) :- measure.

will be **measured** = *metreo* (verb) = from <G3358> (metron); **to measure** (i.e. **ascertain in size by a fixed standard**); by implication to admeasure (i.e. allot by rule); figurative to estimate :- measure, mete.

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

v3-5

As Jesus now proceeds to illustrate, when we are preoccupied with noting the failings of others, we leave no time for noting our own.

Read vs3-5.

Let's first examine the words Jesus chooses to use to make His point.

look at = *blepo* = a primary verb; to look at (literal or figurative) :- behold, beware, lie, look (on, to), perceive, regard, see, sight, take heed. Compare <G3700> (optanomai).

Brown: “...it came to mean to look at, view, look into, and also give heed to, pay attention to something.”

By this I take it that it is more than a casual glance, but does not have the intensity of *emblepo* (6:26, observe fixedly) or *katamanthanō* (6:28, learn thoroughly, note carefully).

speck^{NASB}, **mote**^{KJV} = *karpōs* = from *karpō* (to wither); a **dry twig or straw** :- mote; a speck of sawdust, or dust of any kind—but actually the idea of a dry sliver fits the comparison better. In any case, something tiny.

not **notice**^{NASB}, **pay no attention to**^{NIV}, do not **consider**^{KJVS} = *katanoeo* = from <G2596> (kata) and <G3539> (noeo) ↓; **to observe fully** :- behold, consider, **discover**, perceive.

noeo = from <G3563> (nous); to exercise the mind (observe), i.e. (figurative) to comprehend, heed :- consider, perceive, think, understand; **perceive with understanding**.

Brown: The speck in the brother's eye is seen, but the log in one's own eye has to be noticed and observed.

Matthew 7:3-5

“Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.”

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Romans 14:1-4

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Romans 14:10-13

But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall give praise to God." So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.

Galatians 6:1-2

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

Galatians 6:3

For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

1 Timothy 1:15

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.

Matthew 7:5

"You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

log^{NASB}, **plank**^{NKJV,NIV}, **beam**^{KJV} = *dokos* = from <G1209> (dechomai) (through the idea of holding up); a stick of timber :- beam; a beam of timber.

I think we all get the gist of what Jesus is saying here. We understand His metaphors and application. But there are a few things going on here that are worthy of our consideration.

First, there is the general call for us to not be judgmental or censorious with others.

Read Romans 14:1-4,10-13.

But, as pointed out earlier, this does not mean we are to utterly disregard the failings of others.

Read Galatians 6:1-2.

So how do we do this? How are we to balance these two so as to successfully—in Christ's eyes, by Christ's standards—accomplish both? There is a clue in the next verse in Galatians 6.

Read Galatians 6:3.

Matthew Henry: Our own sins ought to appear greater to us than the same sins in others.

There is the key! There is the essential component that produces the requisite humility. We must approach every situation like this from the position that *our same* transgressions against holy God are far worse than those we see in a brother or sister.

- he is a backslider—but I far worse
- I heard her use a bad word—but I have *thought* far worse
- he has a quick temper—thank goodness he doesn't know of the seething anger in me

We need to have the apostle Paul's attitude:

Read 1 Timothy 1:15.

In the words of the kjvs, Paul considered himself the world's *chief* sinner. So whenever we "see" a failing in someone else, and are tempted to judge them for it, we need to immediately "observe fully" the same failing in ourselves. And we should recognize that the failing that is tiny in them, is huge in us.

Note that in v5 Jesus does not tell us to *ignore* the sin in someone else—to overlook it. But He tells us that to be qualified to help them we must first clear our vision by recognizing, acknowledging, and addressing the same sin in ourselves. Having done this, we will not just be *morally* equipped to help them, but *practically* equipped. Having worked through it on ourselves, we will have the experience—and compassion—needed to help them.

YOUR NOTES OR THOUGHTS

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 7:6

"Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces."

Matthew 10:11-15

"And whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his house until you leave that city. As you enter the house, give it your greeting. If the house is worthy, give it your blessing of peace. But if it is not worthy, take back your blessing of peace. Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city."

Titus 3:9-11

But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.

v6

V6 is a little slippery. It is connected to vs1-5, but the relationship is not readily apparent.

Read v6.

First, we need to understand the words—especially how they would have been understood by Jesus and His audience.

holy = *hagios* = from hagos (an awful thing) [compare <G53> (hagnos), <H2282> (chag)]; **sacred** (physical pure, moral blameless or religious, **ceremony consecrated**) :- (most) **holy** (one, thing), saint.

dogs = not our friendly pets, but *wild* dogs; associated with that which is *not* holy, that which is unclean.

swine^{NASB,KJVS}, **pigs**^{NIV} = not our farmyard porkers; not just an unclean animal (to a Jew) but "wild and vicious, capable of savage action against a person" (Carson).

There is no deep or surprising meaning behind the words themselves, but we must see them as someone in the first century to make the association with the previous verses. The two beasts—dogs and swine—represent everything vicious, unclean, abominable; everything standing against holy God.

Second, we need to understand the structure of the verse, which is in a poetic form that is better understood if rearranged to clarify the associations. Adam Clarke does it for us:

Give not that which is holy unto the dogs,
Lest they turn again and rend you:
Neither cast ye your pearls before swine,
Lest they trample them under their feet.

If a pack of wild dogs are displeased with the food you have tossed their way, they might turn and consider *you* food. If you have cast a handful of pearls at wild boars and they, thinking they are the peas or corn of their normal diet, become angered when they realize they are not, they will trample and stomp the pearls into the ground.

And **third**, we need to understand what this has to do with vs1-5. There are all sorts of interpretations of this verse and various application with what Jesus has just taught about judging others. But I think the best is stated succinctly by Matthew Henry:

It is not every one that is fit to be reproved.

Once we have removed the beam from our own eye and are ready to help our brother or sister with their tiny splinter, we have one more consideration: How will the reproof be received? We are to be prudent and discerning in how we minister to each other. Our motives may be pure, and our preparation thorough, but how will this person receive it?

First, does this person have the Spirit dwelling within? If not, it will be impossible for him to graciously receive—much less implement—the wisdom *of* the Spirit working through you.

Second, is he pugnacious, defensive? Will he take what has been offered in good faith and trample it under foot as would swine, thus despising the correction? Will he despise *you* for it, and turn on you viciously, as would a pack of dogs.

Jesus' counsel here is in line with that which He gives His disciples further on in Matthew.

Read Matthew 10:11-15.

And Paul agrees in his letter to Titus.

Read Titus 3:9-11.

Thus, before we can judge others we are to first examine ourselves, then examine the viability of our actions and words. This is, admittedly, subjective. Which makes more valuable these later passages by Jesus and the apostle Paul. If we go ahead and try, and it doesn't work, don't belabor it, but walk away. The person has condemned himself.

YOUR NOTES OR THOUGHTS

Matthew 7:7-8

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."

Matthew 7:7-11

The computers we use today all have pretty, colorful interfaces that insulate us from what is really going on beneath the surface. The average user just sees the pretty objects on the surface. Even the programmer uses languages that insulate him or her from the raw machine code, and deeper even than that is the true, native language of the machine: binary—combinations of ones and zeros. That last level is getting down to what I call the "bare metal"

Perhaps more familiar, the average driver of a car knows only the attractive interface of the car's cockpit, where colorful displays tell him only what is necessary to functionally drive the car. Some can lift the bonnet and check the oil, while some can go a little further and actually *change* the oil, and change the plugs and points and filters for a basic tune-up. A smaller percentage of the populace can even get down to the really "bare-metal" level of rebuilding an engine.

The passage before us is about prayer, but not the simple, hands-free kind of prayer most of us employ, but prayer down to the bare metal.

vs7-8

Read vs7-8.

There are three verbs in v7—ask, seek, & knock—and the tense of each verb is the same: *present imperative*. It is not obvious in our translations, but what this means is that these actions are not limited to a one-time occurrence, but are to become a way of life.

From *The Discovery Bible (NT)*, by Gary Hill and Gleason Archer, we learn that this verb tense means

"[a] commitment to a long-term way of doing something; a command to keep on doing an action as one's general habit or life-style."

So, first off, in v7 Jesus is *not* saying, *Here's a thought: some time down the road when you need something, why don't you try asking for it.* Nor is He saying, *Seek or knock just once to get everything you are looking for.*

What v7 represents, instead, is Jesus *commanding* us to make asking, seeking and knocking *a committed way of life*. It is to become so ingrained in us as to be automatic—something we do without even thinking—as well as something that improves with age.

As to the verbs themselves—asking, seeking, knocking—how are we to approach them?

ask [5 times] = *aiteo* = of uncertain derivative; to ask (in general) :- ask, **beg, call for, crave, desire, require**. Compare <G4441> (punthanomai).

seek = *zeteo* = of uncertain affinity; to seek (literal or figurative); specially (by Hebrew) **to worship (God)**, or (in a bad sense) to plot (against life) :- be (go) about, desire, **endeavour**, enquire (for), require, (× will) seek (after, for, means). Compare <G4441> (punthanomai).

knock = *krouo* = apparently a primary verb; **to rap** :- knock.

- We might see these as *synonymous*: they are simply variation on a central theme of seeking after God by any means possible.
- We might see these as *progressive*:
 - we first *ask*: strictly verbal

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 7:7-8

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."

Jeremiah 29:10-14

"For thus says the Lord, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you,' declares the Lord, 'and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you,' declares the Lord, 'and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.'"

Matthew 6:31-33

"Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

- we then *seek*: physical pursuit
- finally we *knock*: pounding on the entrance to our destination
- We might see these as *three different paths to the same end*: as personality and situations change, as our entreaties change, we employ different pathways to communicate with God.

Every word in God's word is there for a reason. Jesus is not on autopilot when He speaks, but chooses His words carefully; indeed, the words He speaks are given Him by the Father (cf. [John 12:49](#), [John 17:7-8](#)). So His emphasis is for a reason.

Now that we understand the force of these three verbs, let us "seek" to know what Jesus is saying in this passage.

Just as some people misinterpret v1 to mean that we should never, *ever*, make any sort of determination about anyone else, some people misinterpret vs7-8 to mean that God will give us *anything* our little heart desires. All we need do is put in our order and magically it will appear. And when that *doesn't* happen, they conclude that God is a phony and Jesus a liar. Well, they are wrong on all counts.

Read Jeremiah 29:10-14.

This passage in Jeremiah nicely sets the stage for what Jesus says in Matthew 7 about prayer.

- v10: by *God's* timetable (after 70 years) He will answer their prayers
- v11: He has not forgotten them, He has their future mapped out—and it's a good one
- v12: "you will pray and I will listen"
- v13: note the condition: "when you search for me *with all your heart*." When you earnestly, with understanding call upon Me to worship Me...
The Message paraphrases this, **when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else,**
- v14: "I will be found by you..."
"...from where I sent you into exile." *I have been in charge from the beginning. I am Lord.*

Let's reestablish our context here: **Read Matthew 6:31-33.**

So why is it that we, in our prayer life, so often receive what we *didn't* ask for, do *not* find what we sought, or keep knocking on a door that *never* opens?

From the venerable classic by Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (1895):

According to this teaching of the Master, prayer consists of two parts, has two sides, a human and a Divine. The human is the asking, the Divine is the giving. Or, to look at both from the human side, there is the asking and the receiving—the two halves that make up a whole. It is as if He would tell us that we are not to rest without an answer, because it is the will of God, the rule in the Father's family: every childlike believing petition is granted. **If no answer comes, we are not to sit down in the sloth that calls itself resignation, and suppose that it is not God's will to give an answer. No; there must be something in the prayer that is not as God would have it, childlike and believing; we must seek for grace to pray so that the answer may come.** It is far easier to the flesh to submit without the answer than to yield itself to be searched and purified by the Spirit, until it has learnt to pray the prayer of faith. (emphasis added)

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 7:9-11

"Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"

1 John 5:13-15

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

Matthew 6:6-8

"But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."

Matthew 7:11b

"...how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"

Let's illustrate what Jesus says in another way. To illustrate my point, permit me to insert in vs 7-8 what Jesus does *not* say:

"Ask, and [what you asked for] will be given to you; seek, and you will find [that which you sought]; knock, and [the door you were rapping on] will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives [what he wants], and he who seeks finds [what he wants], and to him who knocks [what he wants] will be opened."

Now let's do the same thing, but now inserting what Jesus is implying:

"Ask, and [what God wants you to have] will be given to you; seek, and you will find [what God wants you to discover]; knock, and [the fullness of God] will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives [God's will for his life], and he who seeks finds [God's will for his life], and to him who knocks [God's will for his life] will be opened."

vs9-11

Read vs9-11.

In the original Greek the "or" that we see in the NASB and KJV *is* there, and it should have been included in the NIV, because it helps us understand what Jesus is saying, which is, "Or to put the matter a different way..."

Vs9-11 support the idea that God answers our prayers to Him by not necessarily giving us that for which we have prayed, but by giving us what is best for us (v11: "...give **what is good** to those who ask Him.")

This means that when we pray for a loaf of bread, God, who is a *good* Father, may give us a loaf of bread, or He may give us a *bakery*—or a book on how to make our own bread. Or He may determine that we have already had enough bread, and should go on a diet! But no matter what, he does not maliciously toy with us (v9: "a stone") or give us something meant to harm us (v10: "a snake").

The prayer that God hears must be the right kind of prayer. This is just alluded to in our passage, with the inclusion of "seek" and "knock" with "ask" in vs7-8; according to their many uses in the Bible, these terms denote "a God-oriented attitude on the part of man"—that is, God and His ways are what we are seeking.

H. Schönweiss (in *Brown*): This gives a clue to what constitutes true prayer. It must be in keeping with the nature of Him to whom it is addressed, in which case our requests will be well-pleasing to God and in accordance to His will.

We see this more obviously in 1 John.

Read 1 John 5:13-15.

CONCLUSION

In vs7-11 the word translated "ask" or "asks" is used 5 times. When a word is repeated like that it should raise our radar. It should cause us to dig in deeper, or at least pause to consider what the Lord is telling us through the emphasis.

Jesus laid the foundation in the previous chapter when He was teaching His disciples how to pray.

Read Matthew 6:6-8.

The disciple of Christ has an attentive, loving, *generous* heavenly Father. He knows each one of us so well that He "knows what [we] need before [we] ask Him." But our passage makes it clear that even with that knowledge, He still wants us to "ask."

Read Matthew 7:11b.

Our heavenly Father "...gives what is good *to those who ask* Him." Combined with v6:8, this means that He supplies what we *need* when we ask. It all has to do with *relationship*.

D. A. Carson make a good point about these verses:

The Fatherhood-of-God language is reserved for God's relationship with Jesus' disciples. The blessings promised as a result of these prayers are not the blessings of common grace (cf. 5:45) but of the kingdom. And though we must ask for them, it is not because God must be informed (6:8) but because this is the Father's way of training His family.

Think about it: What if we didn't have to ask? What if everything we needed just appeared, magically, as if out of nowhere. We would just get up in the morning and everything would fall into place. When things didn't go our way we would be disappointed; when things did, we would be happy. But in either case we would just move on; our response would be utterly earth- and self-focused. We would be either sad or happy—but with what? with whom? Fate? Luck?

But when we ask, when we seek, when we knock at the door of a loving heavenly Father, we are having a relationship with Him. It doesn't matter that He is all-knowing, all-powerful; we are communicating with Him, both speaking and listening. When we are disappointed because He gave us what we *needed*, rather than what we wanted, we are disappointed with Him—but we go to *Him*, and ask, "Why?" We are still communicating with *Him*. We are still in His school room. And when we are happy because our want coincided with His knowledge of what we need, we express our joy and thanksgiving to *Him*. It is not just earth-bound. It is not just fate or luck. It is Him!

H. Schönweiss: God is the Father who loves His own more than an earthly father loves his son, and who therefore cannot permit their requests to be unavailing, but gives them what they need. Ultimately, therefore, the reason why a person who asks is certain of being heard, is the certainty, given by Jesus to His own, of God's fatherly goodness and love. Implicit in these passages is a further certainty which runs through the whole Bible and undergirds everything it says: the certainty that God is a loving God who hears and sees, and who has a heart full of compassion.

YOUR NOTES OR THOUGHTS

Matthew 7:12

"In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Matthew 5:17-19

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Galatians 5:13-14

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

v12

The story sounds apocryphal, but apparently in A.D. 20, Rabbi Hillel was challenged by a Gentile to summarize the law in the short time the Gentile could stand on one leg. The Rabbi reportedly responded with, "What is hateful to you, do not do to anyone else. This is the whole law; all the rest is commentary. Go and learn it."

The "Golden Rule" is not unique to Jesus, and He was not the first to use it, but by all accounts he was the first to put it in positive terms.

Read v12.

Because there is a "therefore" in v12, we really should determine what the therefore is there for. The verse stands nicely on its own; it is not necessary to associate it with anything else to understand its meaning. But here are some options:

- It could refer back to the immediate vs7-11, but I doubt it—although it fits quite nicely as a concluding thought to vs9-11.
- A slightly better fit would be vs1-6: instead of judging others we should treat them as we wish to be treated.
- The best fit, however, seems to be with the sermon as a whole, v12 being the matching bookend with Matthew 5:17-19. **Read Matthew 5:17-19.**

The sermon has been a formal presentation of the New Way vs. the Old—life as it is to be lived under Christ, under grace, rather than life as it had been lived under the Law. So beginning with vs5:17, where Jesus declares that He is the *fulfillment* of the Law, He proceeds to flesh this out: What is going to be different now that the Law has been fulfilled?

And when He gets to v7:12, He concludes with "In light of all I have taught about the true direction in which the OT law points, obey the Golden Rule, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Carson).

If we see v12 as a bookend, then we can look at the verses that follow as a list, of sorts, of last-minute, concluding thoughts, much as the apostle Paul closes his first letter to the Thessalonians (1 **Thessalonians 5:16-22**). And speaking of Paul, he says much the same thing in Galatians.

Read Galatians 5:13-14.

The "Golden Rule" has become so ubiquitous it has become trivialized—sort of like the song *Jesus Loves Me*: Because it has become a fixture of childhood Sunday School it can be regarded as *childish*. But when you listen to the actual words you realize it is not childish at all, but profound.

Just so this verse. Brevity is the soul of wit, and in its simplicity this verse is profound: *In everything, treat people the same way you want them to treat you.* Genius!

In everything, in all things, whatever, whenever, et al... In any situation that arises, whenever you are unsure, just apply this rule. And it is not just restrictive—as per Hillel, "*Do not do to others what you wouldn't want them to do to you...*"—but proactive, as *The Message* paraphrases it:

Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for *them*. Add up God's Law and Prophets and this is what you get.

The next time you hear yourself thinking something like, "I sure wish so-and-so was nicer to me," maybe you can apply the "Golden Rule," and show them the way by being nice to them first.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 7:13-14

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Proverbs 14:12

There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

v13-14

Jesus closes His discourse by staying on-topic—the kingdom of heaven—and offers four warnings. Each warning is a contrast between good and bad, or the right way and the wrong way.

vs13-14	two gates and ways
vs15-20	two trees (good/bad fruit)
vs21-23	two claims or behaviors
vs24-27	two building locations

In this session we will consider the first.

Read vs13-14.

It seems, at first, an odd way for Jesus to encourage people to take the correct path—explaining that the gate to that path is narrow, and the path itself hard. Alexander Maclaren points out, however, that

There is something in human nature which responds to the bracing tonic of the exhortation, "By doing thus you will have to face many hardships and many difficulties which you may avoid by leaving it alone, but do it because it is best in the long run..." Many a youth has been led to take the shilling and enlist by reading accounts of wounds and battles and sufferings.

I am reminded of when we asked one of our church members to join us on stage for a production in which we required a third player to join Linda and me. (The gentleman was utterly without experience, but game.)

- I gave him all the bad news up front
- sent him the script, told him to read certain chapters from my book
- explained how rehearsals would be long and hard, he had to be at every one, had to memorize his lines and blocking quickly
- gave him the opportunity to say no before going any further
- but if he stayed, he could not come back later and claim that he hadn't been warned
- Even with that preparation, after our first reading session, he was overwhelmed by what would be expected from him
- And after a few rehearsals, he *thought* about giving up, discovering that this was really *hard*

TWO CHOICES

Read Proverbs 14:12.

Note that Jesus offers *only* two options—and only one of those leads to life.

The wide gate...

gate = *pyle* (poo'-lay) = a *gate*, i.e. **the leaf or wing of a folding entrance** (literal or figurative)

is wide = from <G4111> (plasso); spread out "**flat**" ("plot"), i.e. **broad** :- wide.

way is **broad** = from **eurus** (*wide*) and <G5561> (chora); **spacious** :- broad.

leads to **destruction** = *apoleia* = from a presumed derivative of <G622> (apollumi); **ruin or loss** (physical, spiritual or eternal) :- damnable (-nation), destruction, die, **perdition**, × perish, pernicious ways, **waste**.
"definitive destruction, not merely in the sense of the extinction of physical existence, but rather an eternal plunge into Hades and a hopeless destiny of death."

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 7:13-14

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Luke 13:23-25

And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.'"

Matthew 5:10

"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

...and there are many who enter through it.

Many, because

- it is the *natural* way, the way of our bent
- it is the *popular* way, the way everyone else is going (lemmings)
- it is the way requiring the *least effort*; we don't have to change anything of ourselves to take it

The narrow gate...

narrow^{NASB}, **strait**^{KJV} = *stenos* (sten-os') = probably from the base of <G2476> (histemi); **narrow** (from obstacles *standing close about*) :- strait. Don't confuse the kJV "strait" with "straight"; "strait" is an archaic term for restricted or constricted, hence narrow.

small = narrow in v13 (*stenos*)

way is **narrow** (v14) = *thlibo* = akin to the base of <G5147> (tribos); **to crowd** (literal or figurative) :- **afflict**, narrow, throng, **suffer tribulation**, trouble; **persecution**.

JFB: This expresses the difficulty of the first right step in religion, involving, as it does, a triumph over all our natural inclinations.

Some have interpreted this passage to mean that the destination is reached once one has passed through the respective gates. If one considers Luke 13:23-24 to be a parallel passage to this in Matthew 7, then it could be interpreted that way.

Read Luke 13:23-25.

But I stand on the side of those who consider the passage in Luke to be too different from the one in Matthew 7 to be a parallel. The picture in Luke is one of someone standing before the door (not gate) of *heaven*, and being refused entrance because even though they "ate and drank in [His] presence" and listened to His teaching when He came to their neighborhood, they remained "evildoers," and thus are consigned to perdition. The only commonality seems to be the word translated "narrow"—*stenos*—the same as in Matthew 7.

So it is easier to understand Matthew 7 if one does not force it to reconcile with Luke 13. The first thing to understand is the *location* of the gates. They are not entrances to heaven and hell—narrow and wide, respectively—but entrances to *the paths that lead to each*.

So, for the believer, the narrow gate stands at the point of conversion. Jesus encourages those who are not yet fully committed to Him to *make* that commitment—to pass through the narrow gate that gives entrance to the hard way that culminates in true life.

The second thing to understand is that those who choose the narrow gate are, and always will be, in the minority.

...wide...broad...many
...small...narrow...few

Most disdain the challenging life of being one of Christ's disciples, and they think it wise to pass up the persecution that may result. But remember what Jesus said at the beginning of His sermon?

Read Matthew 5:10.

Jesus is still on point: the kingdom of heaven.

This may form a mental picture for some of suffering through a life of back-breaking toil, producing miserable slugs desperate for just a moment of happiness until they finally, at long last, reach their joy-filled destination. But I do not believe it is saying that at all.

First we must consider this passage in light of the many others that describe a life of joy *along* the path of righteousness. But consider, too, what this means on a purely temporal level. Set aside, just for a moment, the fact that one path ends in heaven and the other hell. Focus just on the path itself. Tell me, who would you rather spend time with—with what sort of person would you prefer to spend an hour or two in conversation:

- someone who has had a life of ease, in which everything has been handed to them, they have experienced no obstacles to their life of uninterrupted bliss, no illness or injuries, no personal conflicts; or,
- someone for whom life has been a challenge, in which they have had to work hard for everything they have attained, surmounting untold obstacles, and thus coming away both physically and emotionally scarred from the conflicts.

Which of these would make for the more interesting dinner companion?

Just as our pathway after the narrow gate is our glide-path upward, *part of* our eternal life, so it is also the way that develops character, empathy with those who suffer, intelligence—and just makes us a more interesting person to be around.

The fact that it culminates in eternal bliss with our Lord is just a bonus!

YOUR NOTES OR THOUGHTS

2 Corinthians 11:12-15

But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

SESSION 18: OUR DISCERNMENT, PART 1

Matthew 7:15-16

Read 2 Corinthians 11:12-15.

False prophets, in their attractive, winsome guise, invariably teach the *broad* way. They would lead us down the wide, easy path that terminates in destruction. In that sense v15 logically follows the previous passage. False prophets do not always teach the broad way, but they always camouflage the evil of their true purpose in robes of pure white—as their mentor, Satan.

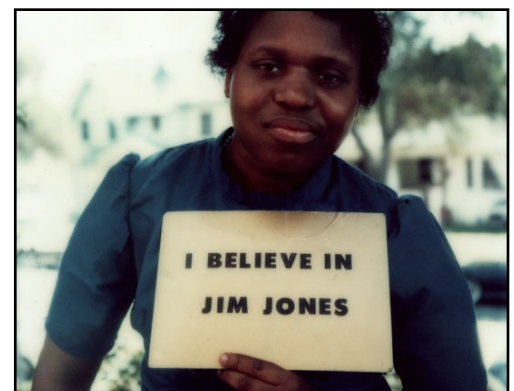
Well before the *Peoples Temple* moved from San Francisco to Guyana in the mid-1970s, its teachings were already beyond the pale. The Reverend Jim Jones began his “ministry” teaching the gospel of brotherhood, racial integration and inclusion, love and peace, man. It began in a church in Indianapolis—and ended in murder and suicide in the jungle of Guyana.

Their instruction, especially during the later days, was not in Scripture, not in the things of God, but in communism.

After the day’s work ended, Temple members would attend several hours of activities in a pavilion structure, including classes in socialism. Jones described this study as like that of the North Korean system of eight hours of daily work followed by eight hours of study. This also comported with the Temple’s practice of gradually subjecting its followers to sophisticated mind control and behavior-modification techniques borrowed from post-revolutionary China and North Korea. Jones would often read news and commentary, including some from Radio Moscow and Radio Havana.

The cult did not follow Christ or the Bible, but Jim Jones. Living now in Jonestown, its members would do whatever he told them—including rehearsals for mass suicide, in which everyone would line up to drink a liquid they were told contained poison. Only after it had been consumed were they told that the drink did *not* contain poison, that the exercise had been a loyalty test.

But there came a day when the drink did contain poison. Leo Ryan, congressional representative from California, visited Jonestown on behalf of some of his constituents who were eager to get their family members out of the People’s Temple. After Ryan and his party were shot and killed as they tried to leave Jonestown, 918 adults and children committed suicide, were forced to consume the drink, or were shot by



SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Revelation 19:19-21

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

Revelation 20:7-10

When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Matthew 7:15-16

"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?"

members of the Temple's Red Brigade security squad. And Jim Jones shot himself in the head.



Read Revelation 19:19-21 and 20:7-10.

v15

With good reason does Jesus tell us to beware of false prophets in Matthew 7.

Read Matthew 7:15-16.

beware = *prosecho* = from <G4314> (pros) and <G2192> (echo); (figurative) **to hold the mind towards, i.e. pay attention to, be cautious about, apply oneself to**, adhere to :- (give) attend (-ance, -ance at, -ance to, unto), beware, be given to, give (take) heed (to, unto) have regard.

This is an *active* word; *Vine's* says it means to

to turn one's mind or attention to a thing by being on one's guard against it.

Implied in this is a foreknowledge of what to look for—an intellectual arming of oneself so as to be prepared for any potential confrontation.

false prophet = *pseudoprophetes* (psyoo-dop-rof-ay'-tace) = from <G5571> (pseudes) and <G4396> (prophetes); a **spurious** prophet, i.e. **pretended** foreteller or religious impostor :- false prophet.

Barnes: The word prophet originally means one who foretells future events.

As prophets, however, were commonly regarded as public instructors on the subject of religion, the word came to denote all who were religious teachers.

In this sense it is probably used here. A false prophet is a teacher of incorrect doctrine, or one falsely and unjustly laying claims to divine inspiration.

One reason we know that *deceit* is intended by "false" is how Jesus finishes His sentence:

...who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

A *pseudoprophetes* is not just wrong or mistaken when he teaches about God; he is presenting himself as something he is not. He is fake, an impostor; he means no good.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Acts 18:24-26

Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

2 John 1:7-11

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.

Matthew 7:15-16

"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?"

So, for example, Apollos, mentioned in Acts 18 was not a "false prophet," though his teaching was not quite correct.

Read Acts 18:24-26.

Apollos was an eloquent teacher with a true heart; he just didn't have the full story. There was no intentional deceit about him, and he became a true force in the first century church.

False prophets, on the other hand, hide their true intentions inside half-truths and outright lies. They present themselves as light, when in truth they are darkness.

So what does it mean, in practice to "beware of false prophets"? The apostle John gives good counsel in his second letter.

Read 2 John 1:7-11.

John's counsel:

- make sure they acknowledge that Christ came in the flesh
- if they do not teach Christ, do not be hospitable
 - do not receive them
 - do not give them a greeting

Why? Because they are "ravenous wolves."

ravenous (ravening)^{NASB, KJVS}, **ferocious**^{NIV} = *harpax* = from <G726> (harpazo); **rapacious** :- extortion, ravening.

This word is also translated "swindlers," as in

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor **swindlers**, will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

v16

Read vs15-16 again.

Look carefully at the words:

First, Jesus says that *you* will know them, so clearly this is speaking of something different from the familiar statement the Lord made to Samuel regarding David:

"Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

Only God knows the true color of a man's heart, because it is hidden from the eyes of men. But men *can* know whether a man is a false teacher, because the fruits of a man's teaching are not hidden from the eyes of men.

Second, Jesus says that you *will* know... This isn't a maybe, or some time when the moon is in its second quarter. No, you *will* know.

Third, He says you will *know*...

know^{NASB, KJVS}, **recognize**^{NIV, ESV} = *epiginosko* (the *epi-* modifies to "full") = from <G1909> (*epi*) and <G1097> (*ginosko*); **to know upon some mark, i.e. recognize; by implication to become fully acquainted with, to acknowledge** :- (ac-, have, take) know (-ledge, well), perceive; **to know exactly.**

them = false prophets

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Jude 1:4

For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jude 1:8-13

Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.

...by their fruits.

fruits = *karpos* (kar-pos') = probably from the base of <G726> (harpazo); **fruit (as plucked)**, literal or figurative :- fruit.

The word translated "fruits" should not be restricted to saving souls (as Charles Wesley suggests—a pastor saving souls). "Fruits" refers to just about anything we do or say—specifically, *that which is accomplished (bad or good) by our behavior*, our speech, our words.

JFB: the practical effect of their teaching, which is the proper fruit of the tree.

Clarke (quoting): "A man's works," says one, "are the tongue of his heart, and tell honestly whether he is inwardly corrupt or pure."

We will dig deeper into this business of fruits in our next session, but for now let's read a passage that does a pretty good job of describing these false prophets.

Read Jude 1:4,8-13.

Let's close by listening to what Matthew Henry has to say about this.

Matthew Henry: You cannot always distinguish them by their bark and leaves, nor by the spreading of their boughs, but by their fruits ye shall know them. The fruit is according to the tree. Men may, in their professions, put a force upon their nature, and contradict their inward principles, but the stream and bent of their practices will agree with them. Christ insists upon this, the agreeableness between the fruit and the tree, which is such as that, If you know what the tree is, you may know what fruit to expect. Never look to gather grapes from thorns, nor figs from thistles; it is not in their nature to produce such fruits. An apple may be stuck, or a bunch of grapes may hang, upon a thorn; so may a good truth, a good word or action, be found in a bad man, but you may be sure it never grew there.

Matthew Henry cautions us against trying to force grapes from a thorn bush. There is no point in trying to force the unsaved into righteous behavior. Fruits come *after*, not before conversion. Of what value is *anything* a declared pagan prophet teaches; if he says anything worthwhile at all, you can be assured it did not come from his heart.

YOUR NOTES OR THOUGHTS

Matthew 12:22-30

Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw. All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?" But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons." And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters."

Matthew 12:33-35

"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil."

Matthew 7:15-16

"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?"

Matthew 7:17-18

"So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit."

Matthew 7:17-20

Read Matthew 12:22-30,33-35.

Let's remind ourselves of the setting here.

Read Matthew 7:15-16.

v17-18

Jesus continues His discourse on bearing fruit in His Sermon on the Mount, stating His thesis in a particularly Semitic manner—first in the positive, then in the negative.

Read v17-18.

As I thought of illustrations of this—specifically in our orchard—I realized that by "good" and "bad" Jesus was not speaking of healthy and unhealthy, well and sick.

The fruit that is produced in an orchard—in our case, apples, cherries, and pears—is not just dependant on the season and weather, but also the year. With apples especially, one year will produce a ridiculously bountiful crop, the next perhaps nothing at all. In the year barren of fruit the trees are obviously healthy, spending all their energy on luxurious growth and foliage, while in the bountiful year the trees themselves may look almost sickly, as they channel all their energy into the fruit.

One of our cherry trees is *very* sick; I have already cut away half the tree because it rotted and died, and the rest is not long for this world. Even so, in such terrible health, the spindly tree can still bear fruit that is delicious.

Look again at what Jesus says in v16:

Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?

He is not talking about healthy and unhealthy, but different *kinds* of trees. Not far from our orchard, scattered about the front field are several honey locust trees—some of which could easily be termed bad, as their "fruit" consists of long, extremely sharp thorns (*actual* fruit is seed pods). Those locust trees will never produce apples or cherries, and the fruit trees will never produce four-inch thorns. When they are healthy those locust trees can produce magnificent (bad) thorns; when they are sickly, the fruit trees can still produce delicious (good) fruit.

So what is the application to prophets and people? Let's be clear: the subject Jesus addresses is false prophets—and, by extension, preachers, teachers, etc.—so we must consider that first. But that does not mean that we stop there. The spotlight of God's word is of limited value if we do not turn its illumination on ourselves.

As to prophets, teachers, leaders, we are to examine their fruit.

good = *agathos* = a primary word; "good" (in any sense, often as noun) :- **benefit**, good (-s, things), well. Compare <G2570> (kalos).

bad = *poneros* (pon-ay-ros') = from a derivative of <G4192> (ponos); **hurtful**, i.e. **evil** (properly in effect or influence, and thus differing from <G2556> (kakos), which refers rather to essential character, as well as from <G4550> (sapos), which indicates degeneracy from original virtue); figurative calamitous; also (passive) ill, i.e. **diseased**; but especially (morally) culpable, i.e. **derelict**, **vicious**, facinorous; neuter (singular) **mischief**, **malice**, or (plural) guilt; masculine (singular) the devil, or (plural) sinners :- bad, evil, grievous, harm, lewd, malicious, wicked (-ness). See also <G4191> (ponerotos).

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 7:17–18

“So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.”

1 John 3:4–10

Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

Matthew 7:19

“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

Matthew 3:7–10

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? “Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

Does this leader build up or tear down? Does he produce fruit that is harmful or beneficial to the body?

As to people in general, especially as each of us consider ourselves, we are to examine our fruit. And I take a measure of comfort in this, for it works both ways. Last week I quoted Matthew Henry who wrote,

An apple may be stuck, or a bunch of grapes may hang, upon a thorn; so may a good truth, a good word or action, be found in a bad man, but you may be sure it never grew there.

Matthew Henry’s remark is from the perspective of the false prophet—the bad tree. From someone with an evil heart a good word or good work may accidentally issue, but we can be sure it was only temporarily grafted on from an outside source. It did not grow from within.

But we can find encouragement if we consider this from a different, and more personal, perspective. Jesus says “...nor can a bad tree produce good fruit...”

For all of us there come moments of doubt, of questioning, of wondering—even if not suffering the accusations of others, we accuse ourselves: *How can I think that, how can I say that, how can I do that, if I am a Christian?* And what follows is the obvious, *Maybe I’m not.*

But Jesus says: *Look at your whole life as you would a whole tree. What does your fruit look like? The apple tree is covered with delicious fruit that nourishes, satisfies; the thorn tree is covered with ugly thorns that inflict pain and suffering. You may hang something ugly on the branches laden with beautiful fruit, or you may hang something beautiful amidst the ugly thorns—but neither change the essential nature of the tree itself!*

The essential nature of a bad tree—an unregenerate person—is to produce bad fruit, while the essential nature of a good tree—a regenerated person—is to produce good fruit. Just as good fruit can occasionally be found in close proximity to a bad tree, so too *bad* fruit can occasionally be found in proximity to a *good* tree.

Read 1 John 3:4–10.

It is not impossible for a bad person to (even if he doesn’t *mean* to) do some good in this world. Likewise it is not impossible for a good person to do some bad. And here is the comfort: A few rotten apples hanging from my branches does not mean that I am, at heart, a bad tree. If my customary fruit is good—if the Spirit dwelling within generates through me good works, profitable words; if I am customarily a benefit to His kingdom, building up rather than tearing down—then, Jesus says, **I cannot be a bad tree.** Because I am not yet perfect, but only *on the way* to perfection, I will from time to time say or do something that produces “bad” fruit. But, as Matthew Henry writes, “...you may be sure it never grew there.”

This is powerful, life-changing truth from our Lord.

v19

And speaking of thorny locust trees, there is no better place for one than on the burn pile.

Read v19.

Here we have an echo of John the Baptist.

Read Matthew 3:7–10.

Either Jesus (who used this same imagery Himself elsewhere) was familiar with what John said and found it worth repeating—or it was a common proverb in the first century. Neither dilutes its effectiveness. In John 15, Jesus uses the same imagery again—this time not about false prophets, but about our relationship with Him, the “true vine.” But the setting is very similar, when we realize that the false prophet is not a part of the vine.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

John 15:1-6

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned."

Matthew 7:20

"So then, you will know them by their fruits."

Matthew 12:35-37

"The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Read John 15:1-6.

The reference to fire is clearly of the eternal fires of hell—which again points to the "false prophet" being truly fake, a wolf in sheep's clothing. This is not a believer who makes a mistake, but someone not a believer at all.

In Charles Wesley's brief commentary on this verse we see right off the problem with limiting this directive about bearing fruit to "saving souls." He writes,

How dreadful then is the condition of that teacher who hath brought no sinners to God!

But what if the calling of that teacher is the edification of the church through a ministry to those *already* saved? God does not place all His prophets and teachers behind the evangelist's pulpit. Wherever God has placed us, no matter what our calling, we are to obey Him and be fruitful in His name, for His kingdom—whether it be to enlarge the numbers in that kingdom, or to build up what it is already there.

v20

Jesus ends with the equivalent of, "Got it now?"

Read v20.

Let's return to our earlier passage in Matthew 12 to see how Jesus closes that teaching to the Pharisees.

Read Matthew 12:35-37.

careless^{nash,niv}, **idle**^{kjvs} = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and <G2041> (ergon); inactive, i.e. unemployed; (by implication) lazy, useless :- barren, idle, slow.

We might interpret the translation "careless" to mean "accidental"—which would condemn every one of us. But what Jesus is saying here is that every word we speak, even the insignificant ones, reflects the true nature of our heart.

In our passage in Matthew 7 Jesus tells us that we will recognize the false prophets among us—we will be able to identify them and take appropriate measures—by their fruit: by their actions, by those things that happen because of their teaching, by the very words they speak. All reveal true character; all reveal the true condition of the heart.

So let's close by bringing this back to the specific application Jesus uses—false prophets. How are we to know whether they are authentic, true servants of God—or just a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Matthew Henry: [1.] By the fruits of their persons, their words and actions, and the course of their conversation. If you would know whether they be right or not, observe how they live; their works will testify for them or against them. The scribes and Pharisees sat in Moses's chair, and taught the law, but they were proud, and covetous, and false, and oppressive, and therefore Christ warned his disciples to beware of them and of their leaven, (Mar_12:38). If men pretend to be prophets and are immoral, that disproves their pretensions; those are no true friends to the cross of Christ, whatever they profess, whose God is their belly, and whose mind earthly things, (Phi_3:18-19). Those are not taught nor sent of the holy God, whose lives evidence that they are led by the unclean spirit. God puts the treasure into earthen vessels, but not into such corrupt vessels: they may declare God's statutes, but what have they to do to declare them?

[2.] By the fruits of their doctrine; their fruits as prophets: not that this is the only way, but it is one way, of trying doctrines, whether they be of God or not. What do they tend to do? What affections and practices will they lead those into, that embrace them? If the doctrine be of God, it will tend to promote serious piety, humility, charity, holiness, and love, with other Christian graces; but if, on the contrary, the doctrines these prophets preach

have a manifest tendency to make people proud, worldly, and contentious, to make them loose and careless in their conversations, unjust or uncharitable, factious or disturbers of the public peace; if it indulge carnal liberty, and take people off from governing themselves and their families by the strict rules of the narrow way, we may conclude, that this persuasion comes not of him that calleth us, (Gal_5:8).

YOUR NOTES OR THOUGHTS

Matthew 7:21-23

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

Titus 1:10-11

For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain.

Titus 1:16

They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.

Matthew 7:21-23

I entitled our last two studies, on Matthew 7:15-20, "Our Discernment," because it was about our knowing or identifying false prophets by their fruits. Our next study I have entitled, "God's Discernment." The subject is still knowing who people really are—what they are in their heart of hearts. But this time we are not the ones making the determination, but Jesus Himself.

Read Matthew 7:21-23.

Reading this I cannot help but be reminded of my mom's oft-repeated admonition. Like any other red-blooded youth, I would try to soften my misbehavior and disobedience with a melodic, "I love you, Mom." But instead of being fooled by my sweet nothings and angelic countenance, Mom would reply, "Don't *tell* me you love me; *show* me you love me."

As one gets older and, by God's grace, wiser, one realizes that "love" is just an empty word without devotion and fidelity. And calling someone "Lord" is just a meaningless title without backing it up with devotion and obedience.

v21-22

This world is filled with those who pay only lip service to Christ Jesus.

Lord = *kyrios* (koo'-ree-ahs) = from *kuros* (supremacy); **supreme in authority**, i.e. (as noun) controller; by implication Mr. (as a respectful title) :- God, Lord, master, Sir.

In Luke's shorter version of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says even more succinctly,

"Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46)

D. A. Carson points out that even though in the early church—that is, after Christ's resurrection—this word *kyrios* came to be "an appellation of worship and a confession of Christ's deity," at the time of this teaching it meant little more than "teacher" or "sir." A term of respect, perhaps even devotion, but lacking the implication of deity.

Even so, *this* "Lord," because He *was* God, knew that this sermon would live beyond the grassy hillside of its inaugural hearing. He knew it would be read for centuries to come, by those who *would* consider the term as a reference to His deity.

It works either way: the case of the first letter does not change the meaning of what Jesus says. Whether you consider your lord God or not, you are still to do his will—you are still to obey him.

Read Titus 1:10-11,16.

It is clear in this passage—especially in vs22-23—that Jesus is speaking again of false prophets and, by extension, anyone who verbalizes an allegiance to Christ that does not dwell in the heart. Whether that applies to anyone in this room it is not for us to know, but it may. So the first examination we must make of ourselves is,

- Is there anything of substance behind my words of devotion?
- If I call Him "Master," do I do the work of a servant?
- If I call Him "Lord," do I seek to obey Him—even if imperfectly?

This self-examination could and should be made by both unbelievers and believers, for, sadly, even someone truly a Christian can lapse into a lazy faith defined by words alone. Not one of us can throw stones; even if we are not deceiving "false prophets," we all can behave this way from time to time.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

James 2:14-17

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

John 21:15-17

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep.

We must be clear: It is not the obedience that saves us, that ensures our entrance through the gates of glory. Actions, no matter how righteous and worthy, do not save. *Faith* saves. But righteous obedience—"good fruits," as we saw in vs15-20—comes from a heart that has been changed by Christ and the indwelling Spirit.

We *cannot* do "the will of [Christ's] Father" unless we first be justified by the blood of His Son. So the unredeemed may prophesy, the unredeemed may cast out demons, the unredeemed may perform miracles—exactly as, and with the same result as if, done by someone who *has* been redeemed—but it is all for naught. Obedience—doing the will of the Father—must begin with saving faith. *That is the first act of obedience without which all others are meaningless.*

Put another way, the same works that would be obedience in the saved, are the same as *disobedience* in the unsaved, because they lack the *first* act of obedience: saving faith.

There is a flip-side to this. We have been considering those who do the works, but haven't the faith behind them. But what about the opposite condition: those who have the underlying, essential faith, but don't do the works?

Read James 2:14-17.

Remember v19-20, above. We know a "tree" by the fruit it bears. If it does not bear good fruit, it is cut down and cast into the fire.

Can there be good fruit without being a good tree? No.

Can there be a good tree without good fruit? No. (v17)

Can there be saving faith without works?—or in the context of v21, without doing the will of the Father? James says no; that faith is dead.

Working on this paragraph near the end of His sermon, I kept thinking about what Jesus said to Peter during His final days on earth.

Read John 21:15-17.

There are all kinds of word-things going on in this passage, with profound ramifications. But reduced down to its simplest level Jesus is saying to Simon Peter, "Don't just *tell* me you love me, Peter; *show* me you love me. Serve Me. Obey Me." As vs21-22 (in Matthew 7) tell us, heaven is populated by those who *demonstrated* their faith by doing the will of the Father—and *not* by those who just verbalized or acted out something that wasn't real.

They will say to me on that day...

Judgment day, the day they stand before the throne of Christ.

Did we not...

RWP: That form of the negative is used which expects an affirmative answer. It therefore pictures both the self-conceit and the self-deception of these persons.

prophesy = from <G4396> (prophetes); to foretell events, divine, **speak under inspiration**, exercise the prophetic office :- prophesy.

cast out **demons** = *daimonion* = neuter of a derivative of <G1142> (daimon); a dæmonic being; by extension a deity :- devil, god.

perform many **miracles**^{NASB,NIV}, **wonders**^{NKJV}, **works**^{KJV,ESV} = dynamis = from <G1410> (dunamai); force (literal or figurative); **specially miraculous power** (usually by implication a miracle itself) :- ability, abundance, meaning, might (-ily, -y, -y deed), (worker of) miracle (-s), power, strength, violence, might (wonderful) work.

...in Your name.

What they are really saying: *We deserve to be given entrance to heaven because of the works we have accomplished by using the authority of your name.*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Acts 19:11-16

God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out. But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

Acts 3:1-10

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, "Look at us!" And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!" And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God; and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

What they should have said if they really knew Him: *We claim no merit of our own, only what You prophesied through us, how You used us to cast out demons, and how You performed many miracles through us. We claim You for our entrance to heaven.*

Matthew Henry: There may be a faith of miracles, where there is no justifying faith; none of that faith which works by love and obedience. Gifts of tongues and healing would recommend men to the world, but it is real holiness or sanctification that is accepted of God. Grace and love are a more excellent way than removing mountains, or speaking with the tongues of men and of angels. **Grace will bring a man to heaven without working miracles, but working miracles will never bring a man to heaven without grace.** (emphasis added)

v23

There can be frightful consequences for those who camouflage their evil intentions under a false faith. In v23 Jesus is about to hand down upon them a verdict of eternal consequences at the day of their judgment, but there can be immediate, earthly consequences as well. Turn, please, to one of the hilarious episodes in God's word.

Read Acts 19:11-16. ["Sceva" = skoo-ahs']

The NASB has an awkward way of stating v13. The NKJV does a cleaner job of it.

Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to **call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits**, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches."

Like the ones referred to by Jesus in our text, these "vagabond Jews," as the KJV describes them, were using the name of Jesus as if it were some magical token they could wave over a victim to eradicate evil spirits and thus—their *real* purpose—make a name for *themselves*. They only knew the label—not the person it represents. Not knowing Him personally, by either experience or faith, they could only refer to Him as "Jesus whom Paul preaches."

Here's how it worked when someone who really knew Him used the name.

Read Acts 3:1-10.

There is power in the name of Jesus—power to heal, to cleanse, to forgive, and save. But there is also power in that name to condemn for all time those who use it for their own selfish benefit. Here's our text again:

"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 'And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" (Matthew 7:22-23)

Can you imagine anything more terrifying than to stand before Christ Jesus, expecting entrance into heaven, only to hear from His lips, "I never knew you"? Even when alive on earth, Jesus reserved a condemnation of singular intensity for hypocrites—those who presented themselves in public what they in fact were not. And here, speaking as He will as the resurrected Judge, He quotes Psalm 6.

"...depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"

SESSION 21: TWO BUILDERS—ONE FOUNDATION

Matthew 7:24-29

The older I get the more impressed I am with how active and alive our faith in Christ is to be. For many, religion remains in the realm of the philosophical, even theoretical. But that is not the type of faith described by God's word.

The over-arching theme of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount has been His description of how our relationship with God—not just its inception through faith in Him, but our day-to-day living—will now be different. Go back with me to the beginning of chapter 5.

- He opens it with what we call the Beatitudes—a bullet-point list of how different from the rest of the world His followers are to be: Poor, gentle, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers—and the real topper, happy in their persecution.
- In vs13 & 14 He says that we are to be salt and light: We are not to be insipid waifs dwelling only in the philosophies of heaven, but we are to bring glory to our heavenly Father by shining for him in the here and now.
- He then, beginning with v21, sets out to show how what we have been taught about the law is only the beginning, not the end:
 - Anger in our heart can be a form of murder;
 - Divorce and illicit lusting after someone in the heart are equivalent to adultery;
 - We are to be people of our word, without guile, in whom “yes” means yes, and “no” means no;
 - We are to go the extra mile—even for those who mistreat us—even loving and praying for those who persecute us.
- In Chapter 6 Jesus launches an extended treatise on hypocrisy with its high point an effective template prayer His disciples can use for voicing their prayers to the Father.
- He then crescendos toward a climax by stressing how we are to be heavenly minded, rather than earth-bound, in our devotion, punctuating it in v24 with “No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and wealth.”
- Based on our choosing God over the things of this earth, He continues in v25 describing how our heavenly Father will meet our needs. Anxiety and worry are not just unnecessary, but counter-productive in a life of devotion to the Father.
- Chapter 7 opens with Jesus continuing to describe how our life is to be different in Him. We are to spend more effort on judging ourselves than judging others.
- Jesus then returns to the topic of prayer, and how we are to freely bring our entreaties to the Father, because He knows what is best for us. Based on this, we are to treat people as we want them to treat us—giving good, just as our heavenly Father has given good to us.
- In v13 Jesus begins to wrap things up by likening the contrast between kingdom living and earth-bound living to narrow and wide gates that open onto narrow and broad paths—leading respectively to life and destruction.
- He follows this with two examples of discernment: *we* will identify false prophets by their fruits, but *He*—Jesus—will identify those who may enter the kingdom of heaven by their obedience to the will of the Father.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 7:21

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.”

Matthew 7:24

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man...”

James 1:21–25

Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

Matthew 7:24–27

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

And now the Lord artfully closes His sermon with an illustration emphasizing the importance of our following through on everything He has been teaching. And a direct line can be drawn from v21 to the “Therefore” that begins this last segment.

Read v21,24a.

acts on = does

wise man = *phronimos* = from <G5424> (phren); **thoughtful, i.e. sagacious** [**keen perception or discernment**] **or discreet (implying a cautious character;** while <G4680> (sophos) denotes practical skill or acumen; and <G4908> (sunetos) indicates rather intelligence or mental acquirement); in a bad sense conceited (also in the comparative) :- wise (-r).
i.e., the patient wisdom of the elderly, as opposed to the brilliant but incautious wisdom of the young.

J. Goetzmann: The wise man is he who does the will of the Lord; the foolish man is he who refuses obedience. Hence the idea behind [the word translated “wise”] in the gospels may be summarized thus: the believer’s wisdom lies in his obedience.

Read James 1:21–25.

By all means, James tells us, “receive the word”; Jesus says “hear these words of mine.” But that is not the end, just the beginning. James writes that after the word has been implanted we are to be “doers” of it.

Obedience.

Jesus says the wise man is the man who “acts on” these words of mine.

Obedience.

It is as if Jesus is standing there before the people; the aroma of the Sunday pot roast wafts over the crowd and they are itching for the sermon to conclude. Stomachs are growling, and they are waiting impatiently for the benediction. But Jesus holds on to them, does not dismiss them yet. He drills it home: *Do you think I’ve been telling you all this just to hear the sound of my voice? These are not platitudes; this is not empty philosophy. To be my disciples I expect you to do what I say!*

James writes that the person who does not *do* the word is someone who forgets who he is. But the one who abides by the law of liberty—the “effectual doer”—is blessed in his doing.

Jesus says, *Don’t just call Me Lord—show Me that I am your Lord. Obey Me!*

v25–27

Then He illustrates the difference in vs25–27.

Read vs24–27.

floods = *potamos* (po-ta-mos’) = probably from a derivative of the alternate of <G4095> (pino) (compare <G4224> (potos)); **a current, brook or freshet (as drinkable), i.e. running water** :- flood, river, stream, water.
We have the word “potable” for drinkable water.

slammed^{NASB}, **beat**^{KJVS, NIV} = *prospipto* = from <G4314> (pros) and <G4098> (pipto); **to fall towards**, i.e. (gently) prostrate oneself (in supplication or homage), **or (violently) to rush upon (in storm)** :- **beat upon**, fall (down) at (before).

house = from <G3624> (oikos); properly **residence** (abstract), but usually (concrete) **an abode** (literal or figurative); **by implication a family** (especially domestics) :- home, house (-hold).

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Colossians 1:21–23

And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—

if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

Matthew 7:26

“Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.”

founded = from <G2310> (themelios); **to lay a basis for**, i.e. (literal) erect, or (figurative) consolidate :- **(lay the) found (-ation)**, ground, settle.

And here again there is the implication of something more than just a structure. The word translated “built”—earlier in “a wise man who built his house—is just a practical word for building—“built”: to be a house-builder. But here Matthew uses a word that can have deeper meaning.

Read Colossians 1:21–23.

firmly established^{NASB}, **grounded**^{KJVS} = same word translated “founded”

Note that this word is *not* applied to the house built by the foolish man.

Read v26.

foolish man = *moros* = probably from the base of <G3466> (musterion); **dull or stupid** (as if shut up), i.e. **heedless**, (moral) **blockhead**, (apparently) absurd :- fool (-ish, × -ishness).

vs24–27 in *The Message*:

“These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock. But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don’t work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards.”

I think we should remind ourselves of the makeup of Christ’s audience. So often when we read or study the epistles of the NT it is with the understanding that the counsel is being addressed to believers—“brethren.” And so we interpret it based on that context.

But there is not one “Christian” in the crowd here. At best there are a few committed disciples, but even they have not yet received the anointing of the Spirit. So Jesus is speaking to people who can still go either way. They can still build on bedrock or on sand; they can place their trust in Him or no.

So He is not speaking of a salvation by works—by “doing”—but of those who hear the gospel and found their faith on the whole truth of Christ, or those who hear the gospel but construct a patchwork faith of fanciful illusions and shadow.

Note how Jesus covers both directions in the closing moments of His sermon. In vs21–23 He speaks of those who do the work of faith—who *behave* like followers of Christ, but in truth are not. They prophesy, cast out demons, and perform miracles—but it’s all just for show.

They “do,” but it is all from an empty source.

But then Jesus turns it around in vs24–27, speaking of those who, perhaps, think they are His followers just because they have heard His words, but in truth are not because there is no corresponding action to their faith.

They do not “do,” because they are empty.

I think it is interesting that the last words of Jesus’ lengthy sermon—the words He chooses to let ring in the ears of His audience—are negative. Were I to organize this text, I would turn it around finishing the illustration and the sermon as a whole with the positive, uplifting example of the *wise* man. But Jesus closes this discourse with the cautionary illustration of the *foolish* man.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Ezekiel 13:9–16

“So My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. They will have no place in the council of My people, nor will they be written down in the register of the house of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel, that you may know that I am the Lord God. It is definitely because they have misled My people by saying, ‘Peace!’ when there is no peace. And when anyone builds a wall, behold, they plaster it over with whitewash; so tell those who plaster it over with whitewash, that it will fall. A flooding rain will come, and you, O hailstones, will fall; and a violent wind will break out. Behold, when the wall has fallen, will you not be asked, ‘Where is the plaster with which you plastered it?’” Therefore, thus says the Lord God, “I will make a violent wind break out in My wrath. There will also be in My anger a flooding rain and hailstones to consume it in wrath. So I will tear down the wall which you plastered over with whitewash and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation is laid bare; and when it falls, you will be consumed in its midst. And you will know that I am the Lord. Thus I will spend My wrath on the wall and on those who have plastered it over with whitewash; and I will say to you, ‘The wall is gone and its plasterers are gone, along with the prophets of Israel who prophesy to Jerusalem, and who see visions of peace for her when there is no peace,’” declares the Lord God.

Matthew 7:28–29

When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

For me this emphasizes Christ’s urgency. He has only three short years to get the message out. He sees stretched out before him not a crowd of strangers, but a flock of lost sheep. They are His people; He created their world, He created them, and soon He will *die* for them. More than anything else He wants to warn them about what will be their end without Him—without His new, radically different kingdom.

...and great was its fall.

Just what does this “fall” look like? It is just a slip on a banana peel?

Read Ezekiel 13:9–16.

Albert Barnes: So falls the sinner. The floods are wearing away his sandy foundation; and soon one tremendous storm shall beat upon him, and he and his hopes shall fall, for ever fall. Out of Christ; perhaps having “heard” his words from very childhood; perhaps having taught them to others in the Sunday school; perhaps having been the means of laying the foundation on which others shall build for heaven, he has laid for himself no foundation, and soon an eternal tempest shall beat around his naked soul. How great will be that fall! What will be his emotions when sinking forever in the flood, and when he realizes that he is destined forever to live and writhe in the peltings of that ceaseless storm that shall beat when “God shall rain snares, fire, and a horrible tempest” upon the wicked!

D. A. Carson: Those who pretend to have faith, who have a merely intellectual commitment, or who enjoy Jesus in small doses are foolish builders. When the storms of life come, their structures fool no one—above all not God.

vs28–29

Finally, just a couple of points to bring out in the last two verses.

Read vs28–29.

...He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes...

For just one example of this, consider that a scribe or teacher of the law would typically preface his remarks with “Thus says the Lord...”, but fourteen times in the Sermon Jesus says, “I say...” And six of those times he says, “But I say...” in describing how He fulfills the law by going even further than its dictates.

Amazing indeed.

Second, and sadly, the fact that they were amazed and impressed by His teaching is not in any way indicative of the condition of their hearts.

Matthew Henry: It is possible for people to admire good preaching, and yet to remain in ignorance and unbelief; to be astonished, and yet not sanctified.

Our faith in Christ Jesus is to be active and substantial. It is not to wither and atrophy, restricted to the philosophical or theoretical realms—thus setting us up for a “great fall.” Jesus has spent the entirety of His sermon explaining how life in Him is to be different—salt and light—and vital. It is to be *spirited*—energized by the Holy Spirit from above, and founded on the bedrock of the word of God in His Son.

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BIOGRAPHY

We are David and Linda Lampel, and we live in a large country house in the rural area outside Winterset, Iowa, in the middle of the United States. Our home is surrounded by fields of corn and soybeans, and by dense woods that are home to deer, raccoons, possums, wild turkeys, woodchucks, coyotes, and myriad birds of all shapes and colors.

The tranquility and beauty of this place contribute to what we do. In fact, we believe that the Lord brought us to this home because He knew that here we would best be equipped to serve Him and others.

Both of us work at home—Dave with his writing, and Linda (now retired) with her baking, needlework, and crocheting projects that are given to charities. Now that she has been unshackled from the business world, Linda has expanded our gardens, and has returned to baking all our bread—and spending more time with our family of seven cats.

The Lord has given us a good life, and we are most grateful to Him—especially for our 41 years together as husband and wife.

