

Sermon on the Mount - 1 **Matt. 5:3-16**

Introduction

Jesus had been ministering to crowds of people, healing all kinds of serious illnesses and driving out demons. His fame spread to the point that He was being followed by great crowds. One day Jesus went up on a mountainside to teach the crowds. He sat up above them where they could see and hear Him. His disciples gathered around His feet. Jesus' teaching was first of all for His disciples whom He was training, but also for the crowds who had gathered from all the towns around.

Jesus sat in this outdoor "church" on a rock "pulpit" and delivered probably the greatest sermon ever preached. He had been preaching the same message that John the Baptist had preached: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near". Now in the Sermon on the Mount He described in detail: who are in the kingdom of heaven and who are not; the characteristics, rewards and roles of kingdom people; the rules of the kingdom; the proper worship of the King; and the dangers of missing the way into the kingdom.

I. The rewards or blessings of the kingdom

A. Jesus was describing a kingdom totally opposite to the kingdoms and nations of this world. In His kingdom you are not necessarily blessed with fame, fortune, wealth, advancement, status. And yet the blessings mentioned far exceed the rewards available in the greatest nations on earth.

B. What are they? To every true member of God's kingdom who fulfills the requirements, the rewards and honors are amazing:

-Theirs is the kingdom of heaven....
-They will be comforted.....
-They will inherit the earth.....
-They will be filled with righteousness.....
-They will be shown mercy.....
-They will see God.....
-They will be called sons of God.....
-They will be rewarded in heaven.....

C. These are the greatest and highest honors possible on earth or in heaven, in time and in eternity. They also fulfill the deepest longings of the human heart. We long to belong to God and to see Him. We long to be shown mercy and to be comforted. We long to be good and to be blessed on earth and in heaven.

II. The qualifications of kingdom dwellers

A. To whom do these blessings and honors come? What are the needed qualifications for anyone who desires to be part of God's kingdom? Do we have to be from a certain race, have a high education, be natural leaders, and come from the right family & village?

B. The qualifications are totally opposite to what we expect in politics and business today.

1. We must be poor in spirit = not poor in money or land but in spirit; having nothing; recognizing an emptiness in our inner man; and our need of a Savior

2. We must mourn = not over someone who has died, but over ourselves; regretting, sorrowing, mourning and repenting of sin; then turning away from our evil ways

3. We must be meek = not weak and wishy-washy, but humble; lowly and gentle as Jesus was; submitted to God; not proud and arrogant

4. We must hunger and thirst after righteousness = not longing for worldly wealth or recognition, but for holiness; willing to do almost anything to become righteous (starving or dying of thirst); only God can clear the life of sin and we must come to Him to do that, but it is our responsibility to continue hungering and searching for a deeper walk with God.

5. We must be merciful = not judgmental, but forgiving; generous to those who offend us; full of God's grace which He extended to us who needed His mercy.

6. We must be pure in heart = with no distracting impurities within; undivided; complete in our commitment to God; undefiled

7. We must be peace-makers = not troublemakers; helping people to reconcile their differences; not creating jealousy and friction

8. If we are all of the above we will be persecuted for righteousness' sake. You can't be truly righteous without having the people of the world misunderstand you, insult you, and "say all manner of evil against you". The reason is that we are different, and that difference makes people angry and ashamed. Our witness of the truth about sin and the Savior is not popular in today's world. People persecuted Jesus because He was different and He told and lived the truth. Jesus calls us to a narrow, unpopular way - **7:13-14**. But it's the way He walked and the only way to the Father.

C. Do people mistreat us because we are faithfully following Jesus, and hungering after righteousness? We may be persecuted because of our own sin, stubbornness and arrogance or our foolishness and carelessness. Those who are persecuted because of their own problems will not be blessed or rewarded. But those who are doing the will of God will receive a great reward in heaven like the prophets who suffered for telling God's truth. Maybe you've never been persecuted. It might be because you are not fulfilling your role in the kingdom of God.

III. The salt of the earth

A. What is our role in the kingdom of God? Jesus made 2 startling statements: Your job is to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

B. Since salt is used to flavor tasteless food and to preserve food from decay, this would indicate that this world is tasteless and empty of real life. In fact, it is rotting all around us. It is in desperate need of salt. Those who know the Lord can bring life, health and joy in the midst of death and decay by telling the Good News and being a living example. Jesus didn't call us to be sugar. He called us to have the penetrating power of salt which in contact with fish can preserve it from rotting. While we must live in this world, we need to live apart from the world's influence. (John 17:15)

C. Unfortunately salt can lose its saltiness. The Jews used salt from the Dead Sea which was filled with white minerals. When the salt was watered out of it, it became useless sand. It was only good to be thrown out. How do salty Christians lose their saltiness? They compromise with the world to the place where they begin to look, act and talk like the people of the world who don't know Christ. In fact, unbelievers can't tell the difference between Christians and themselves. They come to the conclusion that "being a Christian" just means going to church on Sunday and living like the world the rest of the week. No wonder there is no persecution for such saltless Christians, and no wonder unbelievers have no desire to be that kind of hypocrite!

IV. The light of the world

A. When Jesus called us to be the light of the world; He was indicating the world's condition to be darkness. The darker the night, the greater the need for light. Light helps the lost find their way to God. Just as we badly need salt to preserve our fish from decay, we badly need light to illumine our homes. Salt and light are not luxuries; they are necessities.

B. Just as unsalty salt is of no value, a covered light is useless as well. A city set on a hill gives light to the surrounding countryside. A lamp put on a stand gives light to everyone in the house. A covered light does no one any good. How do Christians hide their light? They don't live as people of light because they don't want to be different. They want all their worldly friends to like them. So they look like Christians on Sunday and like the world the rest of the week. But when our light fails, we let the darkness win.

C. So Jesus says that we need to let our lights shine. We do this when people see our good deeds, not just hear our "holy" talk. Faithful everyday Christian living may not bring us friends from the world, but it will bring "praise to our Father in heaven". That's why He makes us lights - so that He will receive praise and people will be attracted to Him, the great Light of the world!

Conclusion

Do we live like kingdom people, fulfilling our role as the salt and the light of the world? Let's not be like Lot who though he knew God himself, never turned anyone in Sodom to the Lord because he did not live as a kingdom person, fulfilling his role as salt and light in a dark and decaying city.

Bible Study
Sermon on the Mount - Part 1
Matthew 4:17, 23-25; 5:1

Introduction

This is the greatest sermon ever preached, spoken by the greatest Preacher/Teacher who has ever lived! In 3 chapters of Matthew (chapters 5-7), Jesus gives us the most important principles we could ever learn. In them is the description of the lifestyle of the child of God.

Read Matt. 5:1-48.

Homework assignment: Read Matt. 5 at least once or preferably each day of the week.

I. Background of the Sermon on the Mount

A. In what part of Israel was Jesus when He preached this sermon? **Matt. 4:23a** He traveled throughout Galilee - to the many towns and villages. Jesus was a very busy person. He wasted no time in trying to reach out to the people of His land. He went to them where they were. Do we go out of our way to minister to people and lead them to Christ?

B. What was Jesus busy doing? **Matt. 4:23b**

1. Teaching in the synagogues. Why did He go into the synagogues to teach? The Jews gathered there to discuss the scriptures.

2. Preaching the good news of the kingdom. What did the people think when He talked about the kingdom? They hope that as king He would free them from the Romans, and set up a Jewish kingdom. What kingdom was Jesus talking about? Most of Jesus' parables begin with "The kingdom of heaven is like..." What was His message about the kingdom? **Matt. 4:17** He said, "The kingdom of heaven is near". Jesus was the king, even though He didn't look or act like a king. He was in the process of gathering those who would belong to His kingdom. What was the requirement for them to be part of His kingdom? REPENT! Without true repentance no one can enter the kingdom of God. **Acts 3:19**

3. Healing every disease and sickness among the people. Some of the kinds of sicknesses are mentioned in **Matt. 4:24**. What is more important - the healing of our soul or our body? The soul is eternal! Why do you think that Jesus healed their bodies? He cares about our problems and needs and shows us His love and grace in many ways - sometimes by healing our sicknesses and sometimes by using our problems to help us grow stronger in faith. If our souls are well we will someday have new bodies to go with them.

C. Where did people come from to hear and be healed by Jesus? **Matt. 4:25**

(Show places on map: Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the other side of Jordan)

II. The place and the listeners to the Sermon

A. Where was Jesus when He preached this sermon? **Matt. 5:1a** He was not in a church or synagogue. He went up on the mountainside. Why? Did Jesus stand up and preach like we do? Why did He sit down - probably on a big rock? The Jewish rabbis might teach while they were strolling through the marketplace, but when they wanted to teach authoritatively, they sat down. For example, when the Pope speaks authoritatively, he speaks "ex cathedra". That means "out of the chair". When Jesus sat down it showed

that He had some very important things to say and was speaking them with authority. We might think that He doesn't look important - no suit, no tie, no shoes. He is God and man - the greatest man who has ever lived! When He opens His mouth to speak, His words will be more important than all the words that all men of all ages have spoken.

B. Who were the listeners? **Matt. 5:1b**

1. His disciples. **Matt. 5:1b** This no doubt refers to the 12 whom He had called and chosen, but also to many others who were following Jesus to learn from Him. Some were true disciples and others went away after awhile because His words were too hard for them. **John 6:66-68** It's the same today. What about us? Are we true disciples? Can we accept and follow even the hard teachings of Jesus? Will we stay or go away?

2. The crowds. **Matt. 4:25; 7:28-29** The crowds were following Him to listen to His words, but also to receive healing and help from Him. Some probably were more interested in their present health than in their eternal condition. But when they heard His teaching they were amazed because He spoke with authority, not like their teachers of the law. Notice when Jesus quoted the law, He said repeatedly, "But I tell you..." **Matt. 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44** Jesus was speaking from His own authority as the Son of God. We see Jesus' authority demonstrated again and again. **Mark 1:21-34**

3. Three groups: dedicated disciples, uncommitted disciples, and the crowd. As we study this sermon we can almost see Jesus looking into the faces of people from these groups. He calls the dedicated ones to a deeper commitment. He warns those who are on the fringe that they will not make it unless they repent and live differently. He speaks to the religious leaders in the crowd, revealing their hypocrisy. He calls some from the crowd to begin to follow Him through the narrow gate, and to build their lives on the rock. We are like the people there - and Jesus speaks this sermon directly to us!

III. The interpretation of the Sermon

A. Some people say that the Sermon on the Mount is like a mark on the wall that we must reach in order to get to heaven.

1. Illustration: World War I, General Pershing's victory parades through capitols in Europe; 27, 000 soldiers with a good record measuring 1 meter, 86 centimeters tall. 40 American soldiers in France with good records, but they didn't know the height; they compared themselves with each other and stood back to back to see who was tallest. A captain came to see who qualified; put a mark on the wall in feet and inches; not even the tallest one reached.

2. If we have an absolute standard, there is no use measuring ourselves with others. We have to reach the mark. Do we have to measure up to the Sermon on the Mount in order to be accepted by God?

a. This contradicts the Bible. We are only saved by God's grace through our faith, not by our works **Eph. 2:8-9**

b. Keeping the Sermon on the Mount perfectly is an impossible dream. If you decide to reach the mark on the wall in order to be saved, you condemn yourself to hell, even if you think you are taller than others.

Illustration: It's like saying that the Sermon on the Mount is an instruction book about how to swim across the ocean.

B. Some say that the purpose of the Sermon is to show us that we can't possibly reach God's standard.

1. Why would Jesus preach that to His disciples who were already believers? They knew that they could never enter the kingdom except by God's grace and forgiveness.

2. Why would Jesus waste this whole sermon to just let the crowd know that they were such sinners they could never get into the kingdom? His purpose is not to discourage followers, but to call them to follow Him. Illustration: It's like someone telling us that it's impossible to swim across the ocean. (Actually we already know that!)

C. Others have said the Sermon on the Mount is a political platform for governments to adopt.

1. Leo Tolstoy was converted and then tried to follow the teachings of the Sermon. He also attempted to get the Russian government to follow them. Their response was to persecute him.

2. Some people have taught that the world is getting better and better, and we only need to get people to follow the Sermon. The Pope has declared that we only need to unify with all the other religions, and the world will be saved. But all of us are sinners who cannot hope to follow Jesus' teachings until we are born again, and we cannot join with those who are not on the same foundation. Illustration: It's as if Tolstoy taught that if people in every nation will take the Sermon seriously we can swim across the ocean together.

D. Others say the Sermon on the Mount teaches a lifestyle for Jesus' disciples who were to enter the kingdom. In one way this is true.

1. Jesus talked about the kingdom of heaven, but He had no intention of setting up a kingdom on earth at that time. Some say that it is a kind of lifestyle manual for the millennial kingdom when Jesus comes back to rule on the earth.

2. The Sermon could not be designed as a lifestyle manual for the millennial kingdom because certain parts of it would not apply - such as "being persecuted for Jesus' sake". In the millennial kingdom Jesus will rule and there will be no persecution. Illustration: It's like saying that we can look forward to a better day when it will be easier to swim across the ocean than it is now.

E. The Sermon on the Mount gives us goals to reach toward while we are pilgrims and foreigners on this earth waiting for Christ to come and set up His kingdom.

1. Jesus set up goals for us to reach for to live a new kind of life. First, we must repent and receive new life from Him, but then we need to know how to live as disciples of Jesus. **II Cor. 5:17** He shows us in the Sermon on the Mount how to think His way and live for Him. He tells us how our thinking must be changed from worldly ways to heavenly understanding. The Sermon on the Mount is radical. It is the opposite of worldly thinking and worldly goals.

2. If the goals seem too hard to reach, we need to remember what it was like to learn to swim. First, we dogpaddle, then try to make it to the end of the pool, until eventually we can comfortably swim for hours. The water holds us up. So as we reach for the goals Jesus has set, He will hold us up. But we need to take seriously His call to get out into the deep water of complete commitment to Him and His ways.

IV. The key verse of the Sermon

A. The key verse is **Matt. 5:20**. The Pharisees and teachers of the law prayed, fasted, tithed, and lived according to the rules. Jesus was not saying that we have to do better than that. He was saying that their righteousness was external - all on the outside for show. They thought that doing religious forms and deeds made them acceptable to God.

B. When we stand before God we've got to have more than an outer holiness. God requires an inner holiness. **Mark 7:20-23** So Jesus was saying that their righteousness had to be of a different quality than the ones they considered the holiest men in their society. Putting it another way, Jesus said that who we are is more important than what we do. Righteous acts must come from righteous attitudes. This is what the Sermon on the Mount is all about.

C. How do we get righteous attitudes? First, we must begin by repenting of our sins, and having them forgiven by God because of the cross. **II Cor. 5:21** Then we press on in our Christian lives, straining toward the goal of pleasing and honoring Christ in every way. **Phil. 3:12-14**

Conclusion

Is our Christian life just a lot of forms for men to see? What kind of Christian are we when we are alone where no one sees us? What kind of Christian are we in our minds, our attitudes, our motives? As we study the Sermon on the Mount, let us allow it to search our hearts and show us the lifestyle that pleases God and the goals toward which we should strive.

Bible Study
Sermon on the Mount - Part 2
Matt. 5:3-12

Introduction

Jesus sat in this outdoor “church” on a rock “pulpit” and delivered the greatest sermon ever preached. He had been preaching the same message that John the Baptist had preached: “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near”. Now in the Sermon on the Mount He described in detail: who are in the kingdom of heaven and who are not; the characteristics, rewards and roles of kingdom people; the rules of the kingdom; the proper worship of the King; and the dangers of missing the way into the kingdom.

Read Matt. 5:3-12

Homework assignment: Read Matthew 5 at least once this week, or once every day

I. The rewards or blessings of the kingdom

A. Jesus was describing a kingdom totally opposite to the kingdoms and nations of this world. In His kingdom you are not necessarily blessed with fame, fortune, wealth, advancement, status. And yet the blessings mentioned far exceed the rewards earned by the greatest people in the greatest nations on earth.

B. What are they? To the true members of God’s kingdom who fulfill the requirements, the rewards and honors are amazing:

-Theirs is the kingdom of heaven....
-They will be comforted.....
-They will inherit the earth.....
-They will be filled with righteousness.....
-They will be shown mercy.....
-They will see God.....
-They will be called sons of God.....
-They will be rewarded in heaven.....

C. These are the greatest and highest honors possible on earth or in heaven, in time and in eternity. They also fulfill the deepest longings of the human heart. We long to belong to God and to see Him. We long to be shown mercy and to be comforted. We long to be good and to be blessed on earth and in heaven.

II. What does it mean to be “blessed”?

A. 9 times Jesus says that certain people are “blessed”. What does it mean to be “blessed”? John uses the word “blessed” several times in the book of Revelation:

Rev. 1:3 - Those who read, hear and take to heart the words of Revelation are blessed.

See also **Rev. 22:7** (Our study of the letters to the 7 churches!) Why are they blessed? They will be ready when Jesus comes.

Rev. 14:13 - Why will the dead who die in the Lord be blessed? “They will rest from their labor and their deeds will follow them”

Rev. 16:15 - Why is the one who stays awake blessed? Because he will not be caught naked when Jesus comes. (**Rev. 3:17**)

Rev. 19:9 - Why are those blessed who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb? Because there is no greater honor than to be there.

Rev. 20:6 - Why are people blessed who have part in the first resurrection? Because they will not die the second, eternal death, but will be priests and will reign with Christ in the millenium.

B. How can we describe what it means to be “blessed”?

1. Some people define “blessed” as “happy” or “fortunate”. These are not very good definitions. Happy is a word that is derived from “happen” or “happening”. It means if a good thing happens to you, you are happy. This is inadequate to describe “blessed”. Fortunate comes from “fortune”. They say if you have good fortune or “good luck” you are blessed, as if riches or fame make you blessed. Some people may believe this, but it’s not what Jesus was teaching.

2. “Blessed” in Greek is “makarios” which means the nature of the highest good. It is to have satisfaction in God’s favor and grace; to be spiritually rich; possessing the happiness produced by knowing that you are honored and favored by God. When I think of the Palauan “ngaltengat” it gives me a sense of being honored and filled with deep joy and satisfaction.

III. Who are blessed?

A. To whom do these blessings and honors come? They come to those who are part of Christ’s kingdom and therefore have the characteristics and live the lifestyle of kingdom people. . We could say that if we are part of Christ’s kingdom that these things are true of us, or that we are striving for these goals. What Jesus describes is totally opposite to what we expect in politics and business today.

B. Blessed are the poor in spirit - v. 3

1. Presidential candidates (or senatorial candidates) make all kinds of promises to get people to elect them. They want us to know that if they are chosen, everyone will be happy and blessed! What do they mean? They will be richer, have peace and no problems. Of course, these promises are almost never kept! These people are proud and boastful, not poor in spirit. Poor in spirit does not mean having a low self image. Abraham , Moses, Daniel and Paul were very strong, capable men, but they knew what it meant to be poor in spirit before God. Poor in spirit does not mean poor financially. God doesn’t divide us by how much money or land we have.

2. The word for poor here means absolute poverty, having nothing at all. Jesus was saying, “Blessed are the beggars in spirit” - those spiritually humble. That’s the opposite of pride and self-righteousness. We are reminded of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. **Luke 18:9-14** The Pharisee was a success in people’s eyes. They looked up to him. They despised the tax collector because he worked for the Romans and cheated his own people. If they were running for office we would elect the Pharisee. Then why did Jesus say that the tax collector went home justified and the Pharisee did not? It’s because the tax collector knew that he had nothing before God. He was bankrupt, and only cried out for God’s mercy. The Pharisee told God how good he was. He was full of pride.

3. Jesus was talking about bankruptcy or brokenness - the deep sense of needing God. If we don’t need God we won’t come to Him. And if we don’t come to Him, we won’t be in the kingdom. If we are poor in spirit we will bow before God and cry out for mercy and forgiveness because we know there is no other hope for us.

C. Blessed are those who mourn - v. 4

1. The second Beatitude grows out of the first Beatitude. Jesus is saying, “Happy are those who are sad”. This doesn’t make sense in this world. We would like to rewrite it to say, “Blessed are those who have no tears at all.” Does this mean that it is good when we mourn over the death of a loved one because Jesus will

comfort us? Yes, if we look to Him for comfort, He will. But this is not the meaning of this Beatitude.

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2. The mourning here is about grief over sin. The poor in spirit are those who sense their great need of God and then mourn over themselves - regretting, sorrowing, and repenting of their sinful condition. **James 4:8-10** How is mourning over the loss of a loved one the same or different than mourning over sin?

3. The Christian life is a cycle of sensing our fallenness, turning to Him, being forgiven and comforted, and then standing and going on. [Illustration When I was young I mourned over my ignorance and lack of sports ability. Through the years that sense of failure drove me to study hard and play well.] When we sense our need of God, it drives us to Him. Then when we repent of our sin, and live for Him we will be comforted. In being comforted we are blessed because we know God has accepted us. How would you like God to comfort you?

D. Blessed are the meek - v. 5

1. This Beatitude seems the most untrue of all of them. We think the meek and humble will not take over the earth. The world teaches that the arrogant, the aggressive, the Mafia, the dictators, the multi-billionaires will always be in control of the earth, and the meek will get stepped on.

2. One of our problems is we don't understand what "meek" means. It does not mean weak or wishy-washy. The Greek meaning was "controlled and balanced" - the concept of power under control - being submissive to someone greater than ourselves. [Illustration: A Greek soldier described his horse: "The most magnificent animal I have seen; he responds obediently to the slightest command, allowing his master to direct him. He is a meek horse."]

3. Moses was called the meekest man on earth. What did he do? Was he always meek? With controlled power and absolute submission to God, he was the definition of meek. Jesus called himself "meek and lowly" (KJV) or "gentle and humble" (NIV). **Matt. 11:29** We understand meekness as gentleness when we put the 3rd Beatitude with the first 2. Being poor in spirit we recognize our brokenness and debt to God. As we mourn over our sins, God comforts us with His grace and forgiveness. In this process we lose our pride and become gentle and submissive to God.

4. Have the powerful and the dictators inherited the earth? Where are Hitler and Stalin and their kingdoms? Where are Nebuchanezzar and Sennacherib? Where is the Roman Empire? How do we inherit something? We receive it through our relationship to someone. Christ will return and set up His literal kingdom on earth. Those who know their sinfulness, have repented of it and live in submission to God as His children, will inherit the earth as it becomes Christ's kingdom. **Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21**

E. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness - v. 6

1. This Beatitude changes the emphasis from our needs to our desires. Hunger is a basic part of life - whether we hunger for food, pleasure or power. Commercials make us believe that basic hungers and thirsts of life can be satisfied by junk food and soda pop. We don't really understand hunger like the starving millions or thirst like a man afloat in a small boat in the ocean. Jesus was talking about a deep and driving desire. What do most people hunger & thirst for in our world?

2. What should our desire be for? Righteousness! But if we think of righteousness (being good) as following rules and regulations, we may not even want it.

[Illustration: Mark Twain said that after spending time with supposedly good people, he could understand why Jesus liked to be with sinners.] But if we go to the root word of righteousness, maybe we can understand it better. It is the desire to be right. We can't be filled and made right if we keep defending our behavior by making excuses. Only honesty and repentance will bring us to "rightness" or "righteousness".

3. Hungering and thirsting is a sign of being alive. We can't take care of our hunger and thirst with one meal. It is an ongoing process. Eating at God's table once will not take care of the hungering and thirsting forever. We must have a constant appetite for "rightness". Then God will continually fill us. When someone loses his appetite, what does that show about his physical condition? If we have no hunger (desire) for God and right, what does that say about our spiritual health? What methods does God use to fill us when we are spiritually hungry?

Conclusion

How do these words of Jesus compare with His words to the church of Laodicea? **Rev. 3:15-17** When we are lukewarm, do we hunger and thirst after righteousness? If we think we are already "rich" in certain ways (power, money, education, position), are we poor in spirit? According to these first 4 Beatitudes, what did the Laodicean Christians need to do? Let's search our hearts to see ourselves in the mirror of these 4 Beatitudes. Are we blessed, or are we like the Laodiceans - "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked"?

Bible Study
Sermon on the Mount - Part 3
Matthew 5:7-12

Introduction

Jesus sat on the mountainside and taught things about the kingdom of God that didn't sound like any kingdom or nation that has ever existed on this earth. He is calling us and giving us the privilege of belonging to His everlasting kingdom. But those who want to enter His kingdom must be poor in spirit - recognizing their debt of sins and their hopeless condition. They must mourn over their sins like a mother mourns over a lost child. They must be meek - gentle, humble and submitted to the Father as Jesus was. And in order to grow in grace they must hunger and thirst after goodness with a deep desire that God would fill them. Our desires will either draw us closer to God or separate us from Him. In the parable of the seed sown in different kinds of ground, we are reminded that "the desire for other things" can choke God's Word in our lives, making us unfruitful. **Mark 4:18-19**

Read Matt. 5:1-12

Homework assignment: Read Matt. 5 at least once this week, or once every day.

I. Who are blessed? (continued)

A. Blessed are the merciful - v. 7

1. [Illustration: John Wesley was a missionary in Georgia. Governor Oglethorpe had a slave who stole a jug of wine and drank it. Oglethorpe wanted to beat the slave. Wesley begged him not to beat the slave. Oglethorpe said: "I want vengeance. I never forgive." Wesley said, "I hope to God, sir, that you never sin."] In the ancient world mercy was often despised. Slaves were treated as living tools. If the owner got tired of his slave he might send him to the arena to be killed and eaten by a lion. Babies were often not treated well. If a woman gave birth to a daughter or a crippled son, the father might just put the baby out in the cold to die.

2. In Nazi Germany there was no mercy for Jews, faithful Christians or anyone who was not considered normal. They were tortured, imprisoned and killed. And of course most cultures have had no mercy on those considered enemies. Micronesians killed their enemies in battles between islands and villages. They often took the women and mistreated them. Mercy is not a common thing even in our present world.

3. What did Jesus mean when He spoke of mercy? This was a Greek translation of a Hebrew word that meant "to get inside someone else's skin", to look at life from another perspective, to feel what another person was experiencing. But it was more than to feel. The feeling was followed by thinking, choosing and action. Another way to think of mercy is to compare it to grace. Grace is God reaching out to us in our sinfulness; mercy is Him reaching out to us in our misery. Mercy understands the hurt, feels the hurt, and moves to cure the hurt.

4. Some people have understood this Beatitude to mean that when we show mercy to others, they will be merciful to us. But that's not always true. Jesus restored the ear of a Roman soldier in Gethsemane, but the Romans then crucified Him. What the Beatitude means is that mercy toward others is the result of God's mercy toward us, and as we are then merciful toward them, God continues to show His mercy to us. The best example of this in the gospels is Jesus' parable in **Matt. 18:21-35** of the man who owed his king about 30 million dollars. When

the king generously and mercifully canceled his debt, the servant, instead of then acting mercifully toward his fellow servant, threw him in prison for a debt of \$30. The king asked, "Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" The man in this story heard of forgiveness and accepted it but never entered into it. The proof that we have really understood and appreciated God's mercy is that we will be merciful to others. We will try to "walk in their moccasins" as the American Indians say.

B. Blessed are the pure in heart. v. 8

1. A professor at a Baptist Seminary asked his students the question: "What does it take to be a good Christian?" They answered with 5 different answers: "a good Christian...attends Sunday School...goes to the worship services...goes to prayer meeting....gives to the church.... wins someone to Christ." 4 of those have to do with ceremony or forms. Jesus wants us to see God! How can religious practices help us to see God? Can they hinder us from seeing Him?

2. I heard about some Catholic young people who went to confession before a wild weekend that they had planned. They confessed not only what they had done but what they planned to do. They made their religion external instead of internal, like the Pharisees that Jesus referred to in the key verse **Matt. 5:20**. When we base our religion on forms and rituals, we are constantly evaluating other people's performances. If we think we are outperforming them, we feel good. We could all compare ourselves with Hitler and feel good about ourselves, but here Jesus is talking about the heart, not outward forms.

3. Our emotions come out of the heart **John 14:1**; so do our thoughts **Matt. 15:19**. It's in the heart that we decide to do good or sin. What does it mean to be pure? First, it refers to being cleansed. Without the cleansing of the blood of Christ we have no hope of ever seeing God. Second, pure also means unmixed, being single-minded in our desire to see God. How do we "see" God?

4. We never stop being needy people. Paul called himself the worst of sinners after he had known the Lord for many years. **I Tim. 1:15** As we grow closer to the Lord, we become more aware of our sinful thoughts and attitudes. That continually brings us to poverty of spirit, mourning over sin, submission to God, hungering and thirsting for "rightness". As we receive mercy, we show more mercy and greater grows our desire to be pure. We grow closer when our focus is on Him, instead of looking down on others in judgment, and the cleansing process continues to purify our hearts. What happens when we drift farther away from God instead of coming closer?

C. Blessed are the peacemakers. v. 9

1. Sometimes we think of peace as the absence of war. The Jews use the word "shalom" or "peace" not to mean the absence of war, but to wish the best for someone. "Shalom" is an active word. Some kinds of peace are passive. If two people fight with each other, they may settle their argument with guns. They are not peacemakers, but troublemakers! If they end up killing each other, they have come to peace, but it's a passive peace. A cemetery is filled with peaceful people. When Jesus spoke of peace He was talking about an active involvement in bringing together people who are separated from each other. Meek people are well suited to make peace. They aren't arrogant, touchy or demanding their rights. They are humble of mind and submissive to God.

2. What sort of peace do peacemakers make? One kind is peace between God and men. We are all at war with God - rebelling against Him. Jesus came to make

peace between us and God. God has signed a peace treaty in the blood of His Son and He only waits for us to sign it as well. God declares that the cross was enough to end our war with God. But we must agree with Him and be willing to repent and be reconciled or brought back together with God. Once we have made peace with God then we need to let others know so that they can, too.

II Cor. 5:17-21 [Illustration: At the end of World War II the United States signed a peace treaty with Japan. Some of the Japanese soldiers hiding in the jungle of the islands did not know that the war was over. Some were found many years later almost starved and sickly. For all those years they could have been safe and well-fed.] People will not know that the war with God can be over for them unless we tell them!

3. If we know the God of peace, we will be people of peace. Instead of driving people apart with gossip and hateful words, we will try to bring them together. Jesus said later in the Sermon on the Mount that making peace with a brother is more important than going through religious ceremonies. **Matt. 5:23-24** Peace-making is of greater importance than playing church. Jesus also said that loving our enemies and praying for our persecutors is what peace-making is all about. **Matt. 5:43-45**

4. If we are peacemakers like our Father in heaven, we will then be called sons of God. Our Father is a God of peace. He is called that 6 times in the New Testament. Paul often wrote about the peace of God that comes from the God of peace. He sent His Son to make peace through His death. When we are called "sons of God" here it refers to our character rather than our relationship. When we are called "children of God" it is showing our relationship to God as our Father. Here Jesus is referring to our character - that we are displaying God's character when we are peacemakers like He is. It is the same emphasis that Jesus gave in **Matt. 5:45**. Barnabus was called "son of encouragement" **Acts 4:36**. That was his character, always encouraging and helping others, including Paul and Mark. Judas was called "son of perdition or destruction" because his character led him to his doom. We will be called sons and daughters of God if we live out the character of the God of peace.

D. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness. **v. 10-12**

1. Did Jesus come only to bring peace on earth? If we become Christians can we expect only peace in our lives? **Matt. 10:34-36** What happened to the first Christians? All of Jesus' 12 disciples but one died terrible and violent deaths. Read how Paul was treated. **II Cor. 11:23-27** Christianity split families apart. Husbands and wives were separated, children thrown out of their homes, and brothers against brothers. This faith which was designed to bring people together, often brought the sword, not peace. That's why Jesus told us that we may have to choose between our loved ones and Him, or our own life and Him. **Matt. 10:37-39**

2. When you think about the characteristics of kingdom people as described in the first 7 Beatitudes, it's hard to understand why they should be persecuted. Why would anyone persecute those who are poor in spirit or mourning over their sin? Those who are meek and submissive to God don't lord it over others. Broken-spirited, dependent people hunger after righteousness rather than power or fame. They are merciful, pure and peace-loving people. Of course, some who say they are Christians don't have those characteristics and they may be punished without being persecuted. They may be getting what they deserve. Peter wrote that a Christian should never suffer as a murderer, thief or meddler in other people's business. **I Peter 4:15-16** [Illustration: The women that I worked with in the prison in Guam were suffering because of their evil ways and sinful choices, not

because they were Christians.] Punishment is what just people give to those who are evil. Persecution is what evil people give to those who are good.

3. Persecution seemed to be something that Jesus said the first Christians could expect.

It was part of their job description. Jesus is an example. He lived in submission to the Father and displayed mercy and goodness. And yet His enemies schemed how they could torture and kill Him, executing Him like a common criminal on a Roman cross. But that seems very long ago and far away. Is it still happening today? More people have been killed in the 20th century than all the previous centuries put together. From 1981-1985 35,000 Christians were martyred in Peru. In Central America 300 pastors were tortured and murdered. Pastors and Christians are being tortured and martyred today in places like China. Jesus said that we could expect persecution in the end times.

Matt. 24:9-10

4. But are we ever persecuted in America or Micronesia? **v. 11** Are you ever insulted or lied about because of your faith and commitment to Jesus? Some people I know have lost their jobs because they refused to do what they knew would displease the Lord. Why do people attack those who are living righteously by the Word of God? It is because they are different. They have a different set of standards. The world requires that we conform to its ways, and so difference is thought to be dangerous. Some people can't accept those who have different values, especially when it bothers their conscience. They don't want people around who remind them by their goodness that they are sinners and in trouble with God. [Illustration: The cry now everywhere in the world is for unity. We are told that all our problems will be solved if we can unify all the religions into a world religion. All wars will stop if we can unify all the nations into one world government. In order to do this we must be tolerant and accept everyone's belief. It is becoming more and more dangerous to be different.] What does the Bible tell us about unifying with unbelievers? **II Cor. 6:14-16** Does the Lord say it is bad to be different? **II Cor. 6:17-18**

5. How can Jesus say that we should actually rejoice and be glad when we are persecuted? **v. 12** It is because when we have God we have everything, for now and eternity. And the day will come when all the facts will be brought out into the open and God will punish or reward all men, depending on whether we loved Him more than anything or anyone, including our own lives. The prophets of the Old Testament knew that and were faithful till death. Sometimes the Lord chose to rescue them and sometimes He didn't. **Hebrews 11:32-38** But the reward is great whether they lived or died because they loved God more than their lives.

Conclusion

Some things are certain. When we go through the waters of persecution they will not drown us if our eyes are on Jesus. The fire cannot destroy the soul, like Polycarp, who trusts in Him. We can count on Him being with us in the floods and fires of hatred, persecution and death. **Hebrews 13:5b-6** And someday we will reign with Him and enjoy Him forever.

Bible Study
Sermon on the Mount - Part 4
Matt. 5:13-20

Introduction

Once again we are on the mountainside listening to Jesus' great Sermon on the Mount about the kingdom of heaven. We have studied all the "blesseds" - the Beatitudes. We have found that to be blessed as Jesus described we must be broken in spirit, mourning in repentance for our sins, humble and submissive to God, hungering for righteousness, merciful to others as God has been merciful to us, pure or undivided in heart, and peacemakers like our Father in heaven. All those qualities make us different from the people of this world. Being different can bring us persecution. But persecution because of Christ is an honor. [Illustration: Charles Spurgeon, the great preacher, wrote that it is one thing to promise to be faithful and another to actually be faithful. He wrote about the disciples who ran away from Jesus when He was arrested. He said that they ran away from honor and true safety.] The only real safety is with Jesus who can save our souls even if our bodies are killed. Jesus told us we are blessed if we, like the prophets, are faithful to the end even in persecution. It is an honor to suffer and even die for Christ. Standing faithfully for Jesus on His Word now will make us strong for the time ahead.

Read Matthew 5:13-20

Homework Assignment: Read Matt. 5 at least once this week, or once each day

I. The salt of the earth - Matt. 5:13

A. What is our role in the kingdom of God? How does He want to use us? Jesus made 2 surprising statements: He said, "You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world." Let us try to understand why Jesus used salt and light to describe the people in His kingdom.

B. Salt was highly valued in the ancient world. The Romans sometimes paid soldiers in salt. If a soldier didn't carry out his duties, others said he was "not worth his salt". Even today if someone is genuinely good, we might say, "He is the salt of the earth". What properties of salt did Jesus have in mind when He used it to describe His true followers? Salt is used for seasoning. We say, "Pass the salt", because it brings out the flavor in our food. We as Christians are to bring a flavor to this tasteless world. We can bring joy and a reason for living to those who don't know the Lord as we do. But sometimes Christians have the opposite effect. [Illustration: A group in New York did a study on what unchurched people thought about the church. They said: The church always asks for money; it's always sad; and always talks about death.] This kind of "salt" doesn't give the flavor of joy, life and mercy to a tasteless world.

C. People in the first century also thought of salt as a symbol of purity. The earliest people offered salt to their gods. In Leviticus, it says that an offering to God must be accompanied by salt. We are the salt of the earth to display purity to our sick society. In a world where lying is accepted and perfected, we should be known for our honesty. In a world where sexual looseness is considered O.K., we should be known for our moral purity. How do we show that we are morally pure?

D. Salt also creates thirst. Even today the Arabs take salt to force them to drink liquids to avoid dehydration in the desert. During World War II the soldiers who fought in the hot areas of the world were given salt tablets. Salt forces them to drink before they sense the need. Possibly Jesus was saying that we are of worth because we cause people to thirst after God. What in our lives can make people thirst for God?

E. Probably Jesus was primarily referring to the ability of salt to preserve food from decay.

Farmers and fishermen of those days - and even today - use salt most often to preserve fish and meat, especially when there is little or no refrigeration. In the Bible the righteous are seen as a force that preserves decaying society. Christians are worth their salt because they keep that decay from spreading as fast as it might. [Illustration: The city of Sodom could not be saved because God could not find 10 righteous people in it. There was only one, named Lot, and he had not helped anyone else to know God.] Remember that He did not call us to be sugar. He called us to have the penetrating power of salt which in contact with fish keeps it from rotting. He called us to make a difference.

F. There are 2 more things that we need to remember about salt. First, it is only of value when it comes in contact with the fish. If it stays in the package or box it is no help. Jesus said that He was sending us out as sheep among wolves, even though that's a dangerous assignment. We are to be in the world, touching people's lives, and yet live apart from the world's influence. **John 17:15**

G. Unfortunately salt can lose its saltiness. The Jews used salt from the Dead Sea which was filled with white minerals. When the salt was watered out of it, it became useless sand that was only good to be thrown out to make a hard path. How do salty Christians lose their saltiness? They compromise with the world to the place where they begin to look, act and talk like the people of the world who don't know Christ. **I John 2:15-17** When Christians compromise with the world unbelievers can't tell the difference between Christians and themselves. They come to the conclusion that "being a Christian" just means going to church on Sunday and living like the world the rest of the week. No wonder there is no persecution for such saltless Christians, and no wonder unbelievers have no desire to be that kind of hypocrite.

II. The light of the world - v. 14-16

A. The sun is the light of the world. But at night, when the sun is lightening the other side of the earth, the moon becomes the light of the world. It reflects the light of the sun. Jesus is the light of the world. **John 9:5** While Christ is away we reflect His light. In calling us the light of the world, Jesus was indicating the world's condition to be darkness. The darker the night, the greater the need for light. Light helps the lost find their way to God. Just as we badly need salt to preserve our fish from decay, we badly need light to illumine our homes. Salt and light are not luxuries; they are necessities.

B. Jesus said if there is light shining you can't miss it. It's like a city set on a hill. In the Holy Land the cities were usually built on hills to get the cool breezes and to help them defend themselves. At night everyone could see the lights of the cities. Jesus doesn't call us to secret service. When we are truly His disciples our light-filled lives will stand out. Others may not like us, and they may persecute us, but they will know we are there.

C. You use light to help people see. If you buy a lamp, you don't cover it up. You put it where it will give light to everyone who enters the room. A covered light does no one any good. How do Christians hide their light? They don't live as people of light because they don't want to be different. They want all their worldly friends to like them. So they look like Christians on Sunday and like the world the rest of the week. God needs our light where the world is the darkest. The darker the night, the greater the need for a light bulb. Darkness cannot put out light. **John 1:3** Darkness gets darker because the light fails. When our light fails, we let the darkness win.

D. So Jesus says that we need to let our lights shine. We do this when people see our good deeds, not just hear our "holy" talk. Faithful everyday Christian living may not bring us friends from the world, but it will bring "praise to our Father in heaven". That's why He makes us lights - so that He will receive praise and people will be attracted to Him, the

great Light of the world! [Illustration: Jesus doesn't call us to be magnificent chandeliers like in the hotels. He calls us to be a single light bulb in a back hall to keep people from falling down and getting hurt when they go to the bathroom in the middle of the night.] He called us to make a difference in the darkness. [Illustration: O. Henry, American writer, said as he was dying, "Turn up the lights - I don't want to go home in the dark."] Our job is to make sure that those we know don't go out of this world into greater darkness.

III. Jesus, the fulfillment of the Law - v. 17 & 18

A. When Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom, the people of His time recognized a declaration usually associated with the gods or a king. Jesus enforced His announcement by doing miracles. People wondered what was going to happen to the old system if Jesus planned something new. [Illustration: During the French Revolution Robespierre decided that the only way to establish something new was to tear down the old. They changed the calendar, made a 10 day week, and renamed many streets in France. They tried to destroy France's past to start something new.] Would Jesus do away with the Law and the Prophets?

B. When Jesus said, "I have come" He was identifying Himself as Messiah and God. In the remainder of chapter 5 He said, "I tell you" 9 times. Jesus was letting them know that HE was the new authority. Did this mean that He would be doing away with the Old Testament and its laws? No! Because He said, "I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." But it seems that parts of the Law no longer apply to us. What did Jesus mean? We need to understand the meaning of fulfill or "fill full" The Law is only the shadow of the good things to come. **Heb. 10:1** The Law and the Prophets were like pencil sketches and Jesus was the painting. The painting filled the sketches in.

C. How does Jesus fulfill the Old Testament?

1. His life fulfills all the prophecies of the coming Messiah, from Gen. 3:15 to Mal. 3:1. Examples are **Micah 5:2, Hosea 11:1 and Deut. 8:2-3**
2. Jesus' sacrificial death is the fulfillment of the whole sacrificial system outlined in Leviticus. He was the one sufficient sacrifice for all time. **Heb. 10:11-14**
3. Jesus is the eternal High Priest, interceding for us. **Heb. 7:23-28**

D. The Law, by which the Jews meant God's Word, is eternal. All that is foreshadowed in the Old Testament will be accomplished sooner or later. **Luke 16:17** God's Word is so important and permanent that it's easier for heaven and earth to pass away than any part of His Word. If it is that important how should we be treating it? Some say we don't need the Old Testament, but when Jesus quoted from it saying, "It is written", it felt like He was saying "It is etched in stone". All of God's Word is holy and to be obeyed.

IV. Putting God's Word into practice - v. 19-20

A. Would you like to be great in the kingdom of heaven? Jesus tells us here who are called least and who are called great in the kingdom. The Pharisees probably thought they would be the greatest in the kingdom because they tried to follow the Old Testament laws, but they had 2 major failures.

1. They followed the letter not the spirit of the Old Testament. Their keeping of the Law was all external - for show. When Jesus talked about keeping "these commands" He was referring to the spirit of His commands. Christ will teach about murder, adultery, and divorce in the last part of Matthew 5. Like the Pharisees we will

agree to His words. But when He gets to the spirit or heart of the Law we may not like to hear what He says about anger, lust and selfishness. [Illustration: If I were a doctor I would find it difficult to tell someone he had terminal cancer. I'd rather tell him only about the lumps and cough. But if I misrepresent the truth about the cancer it can destroy him.] Jesus had to teach us the correct interpretation of the truth. [Illustration: Democritus, a Greek philosopher, said that truth is like something lying at the bottom of a clear pool of water. When you look into the water, you can see the truth at the bottom or you can only see your reflection on the surface of the water.] Kingdom people see below the surface to the truth.

2. The second failure of the Pharisees was the reason Jesus called them "hypocrites" and "snakes". It was because they taught what they were not practicing in their lives. Jesus says here that the one who first practices and then teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom. It is serious to break one of God's commands. It is far more serious to teach others to do so. The question we must ask ourselves is: "Am I doing what God has told me to do, and teaching others by my words and example to do His will also?"

B. Next we come to verse 20 which is the key verse of the whole Sermon. Everyone thought that the religious leaders were the most righteous people around, but Jesus says that their righteousness is not enough for them to even enter the kingdom of heaven! The Pharisees thought they were righteous and the people used them as a standard for righteousness. But were they a good standard? Jesus said, "No!" [Illustration: In mathematics there is a standard. 2+2 always equals 4. You either get the answer right or wrong. Carissa: "Everything's right except the decimal point." That makes the whole answer wrong. In baseball the pitch has to be over the plate or it's called a foul. You can't make the plate bigger. It's standard.]

C. The question for us is: "How can anyone be righteous, or good enough to meet God's standard and enter the kingdom?" It is not through the following of rules and regulations, whether man-made or God-made. It is only through a relationship. Our only hope is in Christ, the living Sacrifice! **II Cor. 5:21** We must discard our self-righteousness. That didn't make the Pharisees pleasing to God and it won't work for us either. We must come humbly to Jesus as needy, lost sinners in order to be made righteous by His death in our place.

D. Then how do we live righteously? [Illustration: When I pay my income taxes I may hate the idea and not agree with some of the things being done by the leadership of my country. But the tax collectors don't care. They are only interested in getting the money. If a wife gets angry at her husband and wants to murder him, she will not be put in jail for wishing him dead. The law cares nothing about her thoughts.] People in Christ's day, like those in our day, weren't convicted for their motives and thoughts, so they were only concerned about the letter of the law. But God was concerned with the heart or spirit of His law. Righteousness is not just conforming our behavior to the letter of the law, but conforming our hearts to the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

Do we live like kingdom people, fulfilling our role as the salt and light of the world? Let's not be like Lot who though he knew God himself, never turned anyone in Sodom to the Lord because he did not live as a kingdom person, fulfilling his role as salt and light in a dark and decaying city.

Bible Study
Sermon on the Mount - Part 5
Matthew 5:21-32

Introduction

A. In our last 4 studies we tried to imagine Jesus sitting on a mountainside preaching the Sermon on the Mount to His disciples and the gathered crowds. He was explaining the principles of His kingdom and describing what a kingdom person is like. Here Jesus calls us to be like Him...humble, hungry and thirsty for God, merciful, pure in heart, and a peace-maker...because in Him we see the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets.

B. [Illustration: A.W. Tozer wrote: "In the world of men we find nothing approaching the virtues of which Jesus spoke in the opening words of the famous Sermon on the Mount. Instead of poverty of spirit we find the rankest kind of pride; instead of meekness, arrogance; instead of mourners we find pleasure seekers; instead of hunger after righteousness we hear men saying (like the Laodiceans), 'I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing.'; instead of mercy we find cruelty; instead of purity of heart, corrupt imaginings; instead of peacemakers we find men quarrelsome and resentful; instead of rejoicing in mistreatment we find them fighting back with every weapon at their command! Into a world like this the sound of Jesus' words comes wonderful and strange, a visitation from above. It is well that He spoke, for no one else could have done it as well; it is good that we listen, for His words are the essence of truth."]

C. In the rest of chapter 5 Jesus reinterprets the Law by saying that an individual has to keep the Law in the heart. Outward conformity such as the Pharisees practiced was not true law-keeping. Six times Jesus uses the same couplet: "You have heard that it was said...but I say to you..." No wonder the Pharisees hated Jesus! He was speaking as an authority higher than the Law. Actually all He was doing was moving the rules from the head to the heart. He was saying in essence, "Have you grasped the heart of the Law - to honor and please God? Or are you only going through the motions?"

Read Matt. 5:21-32

Homework assignment: Read Matt. 5 at least once during the week or several times if possible

I. Murder and anger - 5:21-26

A. The first of the 6 illustrations that Jesus gave about the Law came from the 6th commandment; "Do not murder". That was a safe place to begin because most of the crowd there and most of us can say, "I've never killed anyone, so I guess I'm O.K." It's always comfortable when the preacher is talking about someone else - not us! Jesus began by saying, "You have heard that it was said..." **v. 21** The listeners didn't have printed Old Testaments like we do. Scripture was always read to them in the synagogues. Actually the Ten Commandments didn't speak of judgment, but the Jewish teachers combined **Numbers 35:30-31** with the commandment. Jesus wanted the Jewish teachers to realize that if murder should be punished, then anger, the motive for murder, should be punished as well.

B. Anger is the underlying motive for murder. The motive leads to the deed. The word Christ used for anger was the one for slow, meditative anger that we nurse to keep alive. It was a simmering grudge with desire to get revenge - to get even. Premeditative, or planned murder, gets the worst punishment by the law. God looks deeper into a man than just his actions. He sees the motive - the anger that lies in the heart. Even the godless world knows that you're not supposed to murder and if you do you'll be judged. God deals with motives; He knows whether or not we have righteousness on the inside.

C. Jesus said that anyone who is angry with his brother without a cause will be subject to judgment. **I John 3:15** John makes it clear that hating our brothers is like murdering

them. What did the people at that time do when they had hateful anger for someone? They called him names. "Raca" is an Aramaic word that means "dummy, stupid, idiot". It was used as a hate-filled put-down with a hidden murderous desire. If anyone said "raca" to another, he could be tried before the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of that day. It was worse if someone called another, "You fool!" In that day to call someone a fool was to say he was morally and spiritually rotten - a totally bad person. Using "raca" was an attack on a person's mental ability; using "fool" was an attack on his moral integrity. Jesus said that doing this might cause us to be in danger of the fire of hell.

D. You may say that it's O.K. to be angry because Jesus got angry. Jesus became angry at the Pharisees' legalism. They wanted to kill Him because He healed a man on the Sabbath. **Mark 3:5-6** Jesus showed His anger at the teachers of the law and Pharisees by naming their sins and hypocrisies. In **Matt. 23:13-33** He said "Woe to you" 7 times. That's the opposite of saying, "Blessings to you". Then He called them hypocrites, blind guides, blind fools, snakes and vipers. Was Jesus sinning when He said those things or when He drove the money changers from the temple? We know that He never sinned. **Heb. 7:26** Jesus was angry because of injustice and sin. His anger was not a personal attack or in defense of Himself. He never tried to defend Himself before the false accusations of the High Priests at His trials. We need to be careful when we excuse our anger by saying it's against injustice. [Illustration: We may be very sad and angry at the practice of abortion but that doesn't give us the right to blow up an abortion clinic.] **Eph. 4:26-27** should be our guideline. How can you tell the difference in your life between righteous anger and unrighteous anger?

E. Jesus said, "Take care of anger, whether it's yours or someone else's against you." Anger left smoldering will eventually break out into a fire - maybe a murdering one. If we bring a gift or sacrifice to the altar (church) with anger in our hearts or unresolved hatred, God will not be pleased with the gift. Possibly this was one of the causes of Cain's failure to please God with his offering. His anger finally led to the murder of his brother. Reconciliation is important because if the hostile feelings and thoughts I have toward a brother are left unresolved, I cannot worship God. **Psa. 66:18** [Illustration: Brother in our church: he and his sister had not spoken for 25 years even though they lived in the same tiny farming community. We went to the sister. She refused to forgive even though she couldn't remember all the reasons she was not talking to him.]

F. What steps should we take when we become aware of our anger against someone or their anger against us?

1. We go to the church to give our gift and worship God.
2. God reminds us of someone who has something against us, or something we have against someone else.
3. Our gift and worship will not please God.
4. We go to the person to seek and give forgiveness.
5. We then can offer our gift and our worship which is now pleasing to God. God is pleased because reconciliation is one of His chief interests. That's why He sent Jesus - to reconcile us to Him.

G. Jesus went on to say that we are to settle conflicts not only before we go to church but also before we end up in court. Jesus appeals to us to take care of our disagreements quickly before they become a big issue that may end up before the judge or in prison. As soon as we are aware of anger in our hearts we need to try to settle the problem. That's why Paul says in **Eph. 4:26** that we should not let the sun go down on our anger. We must not commit murder...or be angry without a cause.

II. Adultery and lust - 5:27-30

A. Now we come to a hard part of the Sermon on the Mount. We might like to just skip over it,

thinking that it is a subject we shouldn't talk about. But if Jesus talked about it, then we, too, need to honestly discuss it, and consider how Jesus' teaching should affect our lives.

B. [Illustration]: One young college student spoke for many people in our world today when he said, "Just because some old man spent a night on a mountain and then came down to say, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery', why should I let that spoil my fun?"] Playboy magazine and TV seem to be teaching that all sex is just good, clean fun. People should be able to enjoy it with anyone they please, at any time they please, anywhere they please. Of course, this philosophy has led to the plague of AIDs, one of the most serious problems of our world today. In parts of Africa many children no longer have parents because they have died of AIDs.

C. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus was calling people to a relationship with Him that will affect their relationship with others. Jesus began His Sermon by saying that those who sense a poverty of spirit, a mourning over their sin, and a deep dependence on God will hunger and thirst for righteousness. God will fill them with righteousness, and they will show it in a merciful attitude, a pure heart, and a desire to make peace. Even though they may be persecuted, they will be salt and light in a rotten and dark world. Their righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees, and it will if they understand that Jesus is speaking of internal rather than external righteousness.

D. Jesus gives a deeper meaning to the old commandment; "Thou shalt not commit adultery". It is God's design that each man should have his own wife, be united to her, and be faithful to her. **Gen. 2:24** But Jesus goes beyond the act to the motivating cause of the adultery. Why do people commit adultery? Because of the lust in their hearts. As Jesus looked into the murderous heart and found anger, He now looks into the adulterous heart and finds lust. The sin begins not with the act but with the evil that is allowed in the heart. This is the great danger of pornography. It produces evil hearts. People lust and commit adultery in their hearts with the pictures or movies they see, and it is a short step to doing the act with another person, even a child.

E. By the word "lust", Jesus did not refer to the normal attraction between men and women. "Lust" is sometimes translated "coveting". It is the desire that focuses on another person with the view of having an immoral relationship with him or her. It is a look with a purpose, like saying, "I would if I could". The stress of lust is in its purpose. Anyone who purposes in the heart to commit adultery has already committed it in God's eyes.

F. How does the lust in our hearts get to this point? Lust grows as we feed it. How can we prevent this kind of lust from developing in us? Jesus used some startling pictures to help us see how ruthless we must be when we find this kind of evil within us. "Gouge out your eye and throw it away". "Cut off your hand and throw it away". Radical surgery on these parts would be better than to have the whole body thrown into hell. He wanted us to know that we need to take drastic measures to conquer the lust that wants to grow in us, or we will end in hell. Adulterous desires corrupt relationships. Therefore, we must deal with them drastically.

G. It starts with doing something about the eye. You don't have to put your eye out if you control everything your eye looks at - pictures, magazines, TV, people. [Illustration]: King David was in his palace enjoying himself when his army went to war. **II Sam. 11:2** says from the roof he saw a woman bathing.] We have the power to shut off the channels through which temptation comes, or to close our eyes or look away. But do we? If we don't, the hand will follow where the eye has gone. We will not only end up in hell, Jesus said, but we may take others with us. What if we get caught in a situation we didn't plan? [Illustration]: Joseph did not plan to commit adultery with Potiphar's wife. **Gen. 39:8-12** How did this young man handle this problem of temptation?

1. He refused to be disloyal to her husband, his master - v. 9
2. He refused to do such a wicked thing and sin against God - v. 9
3. He said, "NO!" and refused to even be with her - v. 10
4. When caught in a bad situation, he ran away from it - v. 12

We might say, "Yes, but he went to jail for what he didn't do." But his record was clean before God even though others didn't believe him. And because his record was clean, God could use him later to be second ruler in all Egypt.] We must learn to handle our lust if we are going to be of use to God. What Beatitude can help us with this problem? God will give us new desires - to hunger and thirst after righteousness instead of sin.

III. Divorce and selfishness - 5:31-32

A. Lust leads to adultery which leads to divorce. [Illustration: The author A. Alvarez wrote: "You can make divorce as easy as getting a dog license, but you can't burn away the sense of shame and waste."] The Pharisees knew all about licenses, but they knew very little about commitment and love. Jesus has taught about murder and anger, adultery and lust, and now He speaks about divorce and selfishness.

B. In **Deut. 24:1-5** Moses explained the divorce law. Because women were treated like property in the ancient world, Moses gave a law for the protection of women. If a man tired of his wife, he could just dismiss her. To guard her rights, Moses set forth 3 principles for divorce:

1. A man could only divorce his wife for a serious cause.
2. The man must give his wife a written certificate of divorce with 2 witnesses to examine whether the man's accusations were serious.
3. A man could not take back a twice-divorced wife. Marriage is too sacred to be used as a revolving door.

By Jesus' day the rabbis were using all kinds of interpretations of what a "serious cause" was. They looked for ways to prove that someone was still keeping the law while divorcing his wife.

C. In **Matt. 19:3-6** the Pharisees asked Jesus if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason. Jesus answered their question, not by quoting Deut. 24, but by going to Gen. 2. He said that marriage is an act of God, not a legal contract or even a union of mutual love. Society did not invent marriage; they received it from God. Marriage was not like a business partnership, which could easily break up when things didn't go well. It was like the union of the hand with the arm. Therefore, we cannot break it.

D. In **Matt. 19:7-9** the Pharisees asked why Moses commanded that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce. Jesus made it clear that Moses gave the law because of men's hard hearts, not because God approved of divorce. God was showing His mercy to women. Divorce was not God's original design; His standard was one man with one woman for life. Jesus was saying that at the heart of marriage was commitment. Marriage is not for as long as love shall last; it is as long as life shall last. It is a promise given and a promise received. It is selfishness in our hearts that brings us to consider divorce. **Psa. 119:36; James 3:16** Only being like Jesus will help us to get rid of the selfishness in our lives before it destroys our marriage and our home. **Col. 3:12-14**

Conclusion

Is divorce the unpardonable sin? How should divorced persons renew their relationship with God? How should we treat divorced persons?

Bible Study
Sermon on the Mount - Part 6
Matthew 5:33-48

Introduction

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus wanted us to know that God is more concerned with right attitudes than right behavior. He didn't say, "You've got to do better than the Pharisees", but "You've got to be better than the Pharisees". Without a change of heart the Pharisees had no hope of entering the kingdom of heaven.

The righteousness of God requires a complete change on the inside. That's why Jesus began with the Beatitudes. He said, "Blessed or approved are those who are destitute or poor in spirit". A great sense of inner need causes us to mourn and repent. Then as we turn to God to meet our need, to satisfy our hunger and thirst for righteousness, we will be filled - not with a set of rules to follow, but with mercy. Having received mercy from God, we become merciful. When we realize the condition of our inner motives, we become pure in heart; and the pure in heart see God. Then, like God, we become peacemakers, looking, acting and thinking like our Father in heaven.

We might think that people who are merciful, pure of heart and peacemakers, would always be liked by everyone. But Jesus said that makes us different from most people in the world. [Illustration: A. W. Tozer wrote, "From the days of Cain and Abel the man of earth has punished the man of heaven for being different. The long history of persecution and martyrdom confirms this. But all the world's persecutions cannot silence the high note of holy joy that springs up in the soul that has become the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit!"] As salt, we help to preserve society from decay. As light, we shine in the darkness, leading men and women to God, even though we may be persecuted for being different.

Read Matt. 5:33-48

Homework assignment: Read Matt. 6 at least once this week, and more if possible.

I. Deceit and lying - 5:33-37

A. The Sermon on the Mount is about inner righteousness worked out in life. It doesn't apply to the world or to politics; it applies to people in whom God has worked. In the last part of Matt. 5 Jesus applied this fulfilling of the law to 6 areas. Last week we looked with Him at murder and anger, adultery and lust, divorce and selfishness. Next He turns to the 4th area: deceit and lying.

B. Vows or oaths were commonly made in Jewish culture. What is the purpose of an oath? An oath is a way to emphasize the truth and importance of what one says. There were 2 kinds of oaths in the Jewish culture. The first was an assertive oath which said, "I did it" or "I didn't do it". We are most familiar with them today as used in a court of law. The witness is required to vow or promise with his hand on the Bible that he will only tell the truth. A second kind of oath was the promissory oath, "You can count on me. I give you my word." The best example today is the promise made at a wedding by husband and wife that they will love and support one another until death. A promissory oath was used to stress a strong commitment. A vow or oath is a way of showing that you are very serious about something. Moses said that if you make a vow you must keep it because the Lord has heard it.

C. By New Testament times the teachers of the law had come to the point where they said the only speech that had to be true was an oath. Then they added, "But not all oaths matter". As a result the whole culture became a society of liars. Lying under oath became a fine art. Jesus condemned this twisting of truth by the Pharisees in

Matt. 23:16-22. If anger was the real issue of murder, lust the real issue of adultery,

selfishness the real issue of divorce, than deceit is the real issue of oaths.

D. Jesus dealt with this problem biblically. The people said that they didn't have to keep their oaths as long as they didn't swear by God or by what is sacred. Jesus said that was unbiblical and illogical. If a person is swearing by heaven, earth or the city of Jerusalem, he is swearing by God. **Psa. 123:1; Isa. 66:1; Isa. 60:14** Everything we swear by involves God, including the Bible. Since the Pharisees couldn't leave God out of their oaths, we might expect Jesus to warn them to make sure they kept their oaths. But He didn't! Instead He instructed them not to swear at all.

E. In a world where oaths are used to assure that we speak the truth, we need an inward truthfulness that doesn't depend on oaths. Something is not right when we feel that we need to back up our words with an oath. Our honesty and integrity should be what backs up our words. Everyone knowing us should be able to trust our yes to be yes and our no to be no. Jesus said, "Anything beyond that comes from the evil one." Satan is the one who encourages deceit.

F. Because Jesus said not to swear at all, the Quakers believe they should not take an oath in court. But Jesus wasn't against oath-taking. He allowed Himself to be put under oath by the high priest. **Matt. 26:63-64** Paul put himself under oath twice. **Gal. 1:20; II Cor. 1:23** Jesus wasn't talking about whether or not we should take oaths, but whether or not we are truthful. We don't tell the truth because we have taken an oath; we tell the truth because we are truthful. When we give our word that is all we have to give. Then we are being light in darkness and salt in a decaying world. We are like God when we keep our word. If our hearts are free from deceit, our tongues will speak the truth.

II. Revenge and retaliation - 5:38-42

A. [Illustration: The king of Saudi Arabia once had a woman come to him demanding the death of a man who killed her husband. The man had been picking dates from a palm tree when he accidentally fell, falling on the woman's husband and killing him. The king tried to persuade the woman not to insist on her rights, but she demanded death. Finally the king said, "It's your right to ask for this man's life, but it's my right to decide how he shall die. The man will be tied to the foot of a palm tree. Then you will climb to the top of the tree and throw yourself down on him. In that way he will die as your husband did." The woman quickly changed her mind, realizing that in following the letter of the law and demanding her rights, she might die.]

B. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is teaching that kingdom people instead of keeping laws to be righteous, will have an inward kind of righteousness. Unless we have that kind of righteousness we have no hope of getting into heaven, because our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus says that His righteousness has nothing to do with rule-keeping; it has to do with relationships. A right relationship with God shows in the way we relate to people. Jesus used 6 examples to drive home His point.

C. Jesus has said, "Don't be angry without a cause; don't lust after a woman who is not your wife; don't divorce your husband out of selfishness; don't deceive people with empty oaths - be honest in everything." Now He says, "Don't demand your rights." But what are we to do when someone has insulted or mistreated us? Jesus tells us not to resist an evil person. It does not mean that we cannot defend ourselves, but that we give up the right of retaliation, and refuse to take revenge. The Old Testament Law of "an eye for an eye" and "a tooth for a tooth" was based on fairness. **Deut. 19:21** It was the beginning of mercy. Although it allowed retaliation, it limited it by setting restrictions. It was an attempt to prevent people from getting revenge by doing more bodily harm than they should when they had been injured by someone. It was God's way in the Old Testament to prevent clan wars. "If a person cuts off my ear, I will cut off his head. If I cut off his head

his brother will kill me. Soon my whole clan will be fighting and killing his clan.” This was done in Micronesia and is still done in Papua New Guinea.

D. Maybe we think that retaliation and revenge like that is a thing of the past. It's not! When lawyers urge us to contact them if we've been hurt in an accident, they are saying that someone ought to pay for all our grief. So we use the principle of retaliation to be vindictive. We try to get 25 times our injury by claiming mental pain, inconvenience, and embarrassment. [Illustration: Angela had a test in which the doctor used damaged forceps. She almost died from the injury he caused. We were all deeply hurt. The doctor expected to be sued for a large amount of money. In her pain on her bed in the hospital Angela told the doctor that she had forgiven him. Steve told him that they would not sue him although they had every right to. They refused to retaliate because of Jesus' words.] Here Jesus is not saying that we have the right to retaliate. Instead of standing on our rights, we are to deal with others with generosity of spirit, the kind that God has shown us.

E. Jesus gave 4 illustrations of what He meant.

1. He instructed us to turn the other cheek if someone strikes us on the right one. 90% of the people in the world are right-handed. If a right-handed person strikes someone in the face, he will hit the left cheek. If he wants to strike the right cheek he will have to do it with the back of his hand. But in the Jewish culture hitting someone with the back of your hand was a great insult, a put-down. In a Jewish court, if someone struck you with the back of his hand, you could collect twice the damages because of the insult. Jesus said not to retaliate but to turn the other cheek.

2. Jesus' second illustration had to do with injustice. A person's cloak or outer garment in Israel was protected by law. It had to be returned every night because it was used as a covering. The law didn't protect the undergarment or tunic. People often took tunics for security of a loan or something. Jesus said not to resist this injustice, but to offer the precious cloak as well.

3. The third illustration was about duty and imposition. By law Roman soldiers could force a Jewish citizen to carry their burden for a mile. They had no choice, but they hated the Romans for making them do it. So they would carefully count out 1000 steps, then put the load down. Jesus said that we should be willing not only to carry someone's load, but to offer to carry it a second mile. That's why today we say, "I'm going the second mile" to mean that we are doing more than required. Jesus was saying in effect, go the first mile for Caesar and duty, and then out of generosity and kindness go the second mile for God.

4. In the fourth illustration Jesus talks about requests for help. In the Old Testament all debts were canceled in the 7th year. For this reason some people did not want to lend money to the poor because they might not get it back by the 7th year.

Deut. 15:7-11 The law insisted that when a poor brother had a need, they were to give generously. Of course, Jesus was referring to people in real need, not just everyone who wants something or is too lazy to work. Our only consideration should be whether we can help, not whether we will get it back. We are to give up our rights because of God's grace to us. He has dealt with us in grace so we, as kingdom people, must show grace to others as well.

III. Love and hate - 5:43-48

A. [Illustration]: In the 1800s the prime minister of Spain was dying and was asked by a priest, "Does your Excellency forgive all your enemies?" He replied, "I don't have to forgive my enemies. I have had them all shot."] Sometimes we want to get rid of our enemies, too. The Law said that you should love your neighbor and hate your enemy. Once again Jesus said, "But I tell you: Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you." The philosopher Kant when he read these words said they are nonsense because no one can love his enemies. But Augustine said, "To love those who love you is human; to hate those who love you is demonic; but to love those who hate you is divine." That means it's like God.

B. Jesus said that when we love our enemies it shows that we are sons of our Father in heaven. He is not urging us to do those things to become His children. We do them because we are God's children. He was not talking about emotional love, but about "agape" love - a set of the mind. I choose to treat my enemies in a good way not because I feel like it but because I make it the attitude of my mind. One of the best ways I can do this is by praying for them. If we are to be like the Father, then we need to know what He is like. Does He bless, protect and provide only for the good ones who follow Him? No! The sun also rises on the evil and the rain falls on the unrighteous. Does that mean that God approves of them? No! But He is full of grace. **II Pet. 3:9** His desire is that His kindness will lead them to repentance.

C. If we return love for love, how is that different from the world? [Illustration]: Jesus used tax collectors as His example. We might use the Mafia, some of the greatest criminals in the world. Family is very important to them. They will do everything to protect their family. They love family and kill anyone they consider an enemy.] Jesus said if we greet only our brothers, are we any better than the pagans? To greet someone in the Middle East was to wish the best and God's blessing on them. [Illustration]: The Auca Indians of Ecuador were pagan who did not know God. They would greet those they knew, but they speared 5 missionaries because they didn't know them.] If we love our enemies will they return love to us? The reason the missionaries went there was because they loved the Auca Indians.

D. The world system says that it's O.K. to be angry, to lust, to be selfish, to be deceitful, to get your rights and to hate anyone who's different or who is your enemy. Jesus' teaching runs counter to the entire system of the world. He calls us finally to be "perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect". Isn't that asking a little too much? Is it possible for us to be perfect? This word for perfect does not mean sinlessly perfect. It means mature rather than childish; like a teacher rather than a student. It means being well-rounded or complete, fulfilling the function for which it was made. We might say, "That's a perfect tomato for a salad". [Illustration]: When Willie Mays was reinstated into baseball, a sports writer said of him, "He was probably the perfect ball player." He did not mean that he never made a mistake or struck out. Willie Mays was well-rounded. He knew the strategy of the game and could hit, run, catch and steal bases.] This perfection is like a transparent window. Everything is clear on the other side. There are no hidden agendas or secrets. It is our goal to be like the Father whose children we already are.

Conclusion

Jesus has been dealing with a whole list of inner feelings and motives which tend to control us even as we give the outward appearance of being "good". Beneath the surface lies the true person we are, possibly harboring anger, lust, selfishness, deceit, insistence on our rights, and hatred [Illustration]: Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote this about Thomas Cranmer: "To do him a wrong was to beget a kindness from him. For his heart was so rich...that if you sowed therein the seeds of hate, they blossomed love."]

Bible Study
Sermon on the Mount - Part 7
Matthew 6:1-18

Introduction

[Illustration: Addison Mizner was a famous builder in the early 1900s. Even though he had almost no professional training he designed and built many houses for the rich people of Florida. One time he built a two-story house without a stairway. Once a client asked to get a copy of the blueprints of the estate Mizner was going to build for him. Builders always have blueprints which they follow closely when they construct the building. Mizner said to the client, "The house isn't built yet! Construction first, blueprints afterward."]

Many times we are like the Pharisees of Jesus' time who were more interested in the decorations on the outside than what was on the inside. [Illustration: When I visited the Philippines I saw many fancy looking houses. But Angela said that she had watched them during the building process as she walked down their streets. What looked beautiful on the outside when it was finished was very poorly made under the paint and outward decorations.] We need a blueprint to follow if we are going to build a strong and sturdy house. Building a sermon is like building a house. You need a blueprint or central idea. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus' central idea around which the Sermon is built is this: "How can anyone be righteous enough to please God?" In the key verse (**Matt. 5:20**) Jesus made it clear that being like the religious leaders of the day who appeared holy on the outside would not be good enough to give entrance to the kingdom.

In developing this central idea, Jesus began by giving the Beatitudes which are the attitudes that characterize people who enter the kingdom. Beatitude people will be salt and light in a rotten and dark world because their faith is based on a relationship rather than rules. To help us understand this, Jesus gave six case studies - murder and anger, adultery and lust, divorce and selfishness, oaths and deceit, retaliation and rights, hate and love. In each case Jesus gave principles that flow from inner righteousness.

Read Matt. 6:1-18

Homework Assignment: Read Matt. 6 at least once during the week or more often if possible

I. "Acts of righteousness" - 6:1

A. Jesus' next subjects were about giving to the poor, praying and fasting. The Pharisees did all those but Jesus had said about them, "Unless your righteousness surpasses theirs, you will not enter the kingdom". These religious leaders were doing all the acts that made them appear holy. But it is not a holy act and is not true righteousness if it is done for show, to gain prestige, to gain a reputation or even to try to buy God's favor. Jesus summarizes His primary teaching right at the start in **verse 1**: "Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men to be seen by them." Do you think we can call them "acts of righteousness" if we do them only to be seen by others? What should we call them? Maybe "acts of pride" or "acts of self-righteousness"?

B. In this teaching Jesus assumes that we who are members of His kingdom will be faithful to give, pray and fast. He says...."when you give to the needy...when you pray.... when you fast..." His question was not about whether we should do those things, but what our attitudes and motives should be when we do them.

C. Jesus says three times in **verses 2, 5 & 16** that we must not be like the hypocrites. What is a hypocrite? He is one who appears to be very good but actually his religion is an empty show. Jesus repeatedly called the Pharisees and teachers of the law "hypocrites". They were supposed to be more holy than anyone else, but Jesus looked into their hearts and

knew that their religion was only an outward show. Their hypocrisy was proven when they crucified the Lord. What will be the reward of the hypocrites whose religion is an empty show before men? Jesus repeated 3 times in this passage, "I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full." It's as if they received a bill they hoped to collect already marked, "paid in full". Their only reward is the admiration and honor people give them for their supposed "good deeds". If this is true, what should our good deeds or acts of mercy be like?

II. Giving to the needy - v. 2-4

A. It's amazing to us to think of a Pharisee actually announcing his giving in the synagogues and on the streets with trumpets. But that's what they did. Today we would say, "He blew his own horn." When we watch some evangelists on TV and the people who follow their teaching, we see them doing even stranger things than blowing trumpets. They shout and wave their arms and dance around trying to show that they are holier or "more anointed" than the rest of us. The Jews ranked giving to the needy as better than sacrifice. Jesus agreed with this, but He said that more important than giving was the motive that prompted them to give. Some people give out of guilt; some from a feeling of obligation; some from a sense of superiority. Most people who give want some recognition of their generosity. They want their names printed on a plaque or program. Jesus said that we want to be honored by men. If we give to be seen by others and we receive their applause, we have been paid in full. If we want the praise of men, we can have it; but then God owes us nothing.

B. Then how should we give to the needy? Jesus says that our giving should be as secret as possible: "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." How do we give like that? First, we don't tell others how much we gave. Second, we hardly remember ourselves who we gave to or how much we gave them. It's as if part of us doesn't even know what the other part gave. When Jesus commended the sheep for helping Him, they couldn't even remember doing those kind things. **Matt. 25:37-40**. True giving comes from a cheerful heart eager to help without feeling forced or expecting thanks.

II Cor. 9:6-8 Though no one else may thank us, the Father who sees the secret act of love will reward us.

III. Praying - v. 5-8

A. Prayer was as important in the Jewish religion as it is in the Christian faith. When they awoke in the morning they prayed **Deut. 6:4-5**. In the evening as the sun was setting they prayed the same prayer. During the day they had set times for prayer at 9:00 AM, 12:00 noon, and 3:00 PM, and they had specific prayers for different occasions. It's good to pray many times a day, but sometimes when we do this it is automatic rather than from the heart. [Illustration: Have you ever thanked God for your food before a meal and then forgot what you prayed or whether you prayed at all?] The Pharisees loved to pray standing in the synagogues or on the street corners where everyone could see and hear them. At the hours of prayer they would be on the top step of the synagogue or in the marketplace with their arms stretched out and their eyes shut, making it clear that they were very holy. Jesus told a parable about a Pharisee like that. **Luke 18:10-13** You can watch TV and see this kind of show every day.

B. Some of the Jews had the idea that if you were holy you would pray very long prayers, or say the same thing over and over. [Illustration: Repeating of the rosary and "Hail Mary" prayers.] There is nothing wrong with long prayers if our hearts are truly in touch with God. But many words do not impress God, even though some people might be impressed by them. For the pagan unbelievers, prayer was like a magic formula. They thought if they found the right words and said them over and over, perhaps the gods would give them what they asked. There are many today who think that if you find the

right words and have the right faith, you can get whatever you want from God.

[Illustration: Paul Hiebert wrote: "Magic is the opposite of religion. In magic, we are in control; in religion we are in submission to God and His will...Faith is not some kind of power that controls God. It is entrusting ourselves completely to God's care."] Jesus said, "Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." What is God like? Is He Someone who has to do what we say when we say it the right way? Is He the kind of Person who is so dull that we have to say the same things over and over to Him? These ways of dealing with God are insulting to Him. What is God like then and how should we pray to Him?

C. Jesus was not opposed to public prayer, but He was opposed to any prayer which is a show to be seen by men. That's why He said when we pray we need to remember that God is our Father. Yes, He is unseen, but He is alive and real. It is very hard for us to really communicate with our unseen Father unless we go into a quiet, secret place where we can think of Him and talk to Him privately. We have to "close the door" on distractions from the outside. If you don't have a secret room, you can still find a quiet corner or a quiet time of the day or night when you can be alone with God. There you can talk to Him as you would to a loving earthly father. Jesus gave us the example of how to talk to Him. We will study that sample prayer in a minute.

IV. Fasting - v. 16-18

A. The religious Jews covered their heads with ashes when they were fasting. They disfigured their faces so that everyone would know that they were suffering without food. This emphasized the fact that they were holier than others to make such a sacrifice. In the Old Testament fasting always had to do with acknowledging sin. Prayer draws men to God and fasting draws them away from self and sin. We see this in the revival in Nineveh. **Jonah 3:7-10** Many people today look at fasting as a way of winning God's approval. [Illustration: Eating no meat on Fridays or fasting during Lent is thought by some to gain approval with God.] We cannot manipulate God to give us what we want through prayer or fasting.

B. Was Jesus against fasting? Fasting can be helpful at times to separate us from the distractions of preparing food, eating and cleaning up. It may help us to concentrate on the Lord and prayer. It may also be beneficial to those who are struggling with a major decision or sinful habit. Jesus did not say not to fast. He said, "When you fast..." He was emphasizing that fasting should be secret. He said, "Put oil on your head" - not ashes. "Wash your face" - don't disfigure it as if you are suffering. It should not be obvious to others that we are fasting. It must be something we feel that we should do - just between our unseen Father and us. Then our Father who sees what is done in secret will reward us according to His good pleasure.

V. The Lord's Prayer - v. 9-15

A. What we now call the Lord's Prayer is actually a sample or model prayer for the disciples in answer to their request, "Lord, teach us to pray". **Luke 11:1** Jesus could not have prayed this prayer Himself because He had no debts to be forgiven (**v. 12**). It would be more accurate to call it the Disciples' Prayer or a model prayer for those who follow Jesus and want to know how to pray. Thinking about the things Jesus has taught here about prayer, do you think that we sometimes use this sample prayer in a wrong way? Is it designed to repeat over and over? Jesus is teaching us here how to pray, not giving us words to repeat. This prayer gives us an example of the kinds of things we should pray for and our attitudes when we pray.

B. [Illustration: A father had pennies in his hand. He called his children onto his lap to try to pry the pennies out of his hand. The pennies were not important to him. What was important was having his children sit on his lap while they talked and played with him.] We often

concentrate on the gifts in God's hand while we ignore God. His gifts are wonderful, but He offers us Himself - the greatest gift of all! Jesus says that our prayers should be addressed to "Our Father". God is not everyone's Father. He is everyone's Creator, but not everyone's Father. We only have a relationship with Him when we become His children through the new birth. Saying "in heaven" doesn't refer to God's zip code; It refers to His elevation above all. When we come to God we need to worship Him in His perfect character and holiness. When we talk with Him heart to heart and mind to mind, we affirm our love for each other.

C. The first step in spiritual growth is not to pray for inner feeling or inner change, but that God will indeed be God in our lives. The focus of our spiritual life is our honor of God. How do we honor Him? We hallow His name. We set apart His name, making it something special. Then we pray that His kingdom will come. All through scripture, the story of the Bible looks forward to the return of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who will rule in righteousness on this earth. As we pray for that, we need to do what we can to see that people come into His kingdom. When we pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" we recognize that God's will is totally done in heaven. But here on earth it's often not done. As we pray for His will to be done we need to be aware of places in our lives where we are not doing His will = what He wants and desires. Praying for His will to be done should include our commitment to do it each day in our circumstances.

D. When we have worshipped our Father and prayed for His kingdom and His will, we can then make our requests. [Illustration: A German theologian wrote that the whole of life is captured in the rainbow of the requests in this prayer. "Great things, small things, spiritual things and material things, inward things and outward things" All are included.] It is proper and right to pray for our daily needs. "Bread" refers to all that we must have to live. "Daily" means enough for the coming day. We are not invited to pray for luxuries, but necessities. Nor are we invited to request supplies for years to come.

E. Confession of our sins and debts to God is an important part of prayer. Jesus teaches us to pray that God will forgive us, "as we also have forgiven others". Jesus explains this further in **verses 14 & 15**, making it very clear that if we are unwilling to forgive others, the Father will not forgive us. [Illustration: Augustine called this request for forgiveness "the terrible petition" because if we have an unforgiving spirit, we are actually asking God not to forgive us.] How often we forget this important condition. When we say the "Lord's Prayer" we should be reminded of those whom we haven't forgiven, and quickly do it.

F. Having prayed for provision and pardon, we go on to seek His protection. We are surrounded by 10,000 temptations of Satan to live life apart from God. We are tempted to honor our own names, to build our own kingdoms, to take credit for baking our own bread, and to deny our need for forgiving grace. The enemy of our souls wants us to cast away from God. Only God can make us see sin for what it is. So we pray for protection from temptation, deliverance from the evil one, and discernment to be able to see evil for what it is. This prayer should help to remind us that we need to be listening and obeying the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the Word.

Conclusion

Giving, praying and fasting are not things we do for public display They are private actions done for the good of others or for strengthening our own spiritual lives. Religion is not a performance; it is faithfulness to a Person. It is our private obedience meant for viewing by our Father in heaven.

Bible Study
Sermon on the Mount - Part 8
Matt. 6:19-34

Introduction

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is talking about righteousness. The key idea is that our righteousness must be of a different quality than that of the Pharisees. The righteousness we are to seek does not come from keeping rules and rituals; it has to do with relationships. It begins with our relationship to God which grows with pure motives, not outward forms, and with right attitudes, not religious acts. This righteousness is shown in the way we perform religious deeds - giving, praying, and fasting. We don't do them for show, but for God and His kingdom.

Read Matthew 6:19-34

Homework assignment: Read Matt. 7 at least once during the week or more often if possible.

I. Storing up treasures - v. 19-21

A. Some people have felt that Jesus' warning about not storing up earthly treasures means that we are not to have a bank account or own property. **II Cor. 12:14** assures us that it is correct for parents to save for their children. In **Prov. 6:6** we are encouraged to take a lesson from the ant which stores up for the future. The Bible acknowledges the right to own private property. Ananias and Sappira were rebuked by Peter for lying, not for possessing property. **Acts 5:4** Jesus warned against storing up goods for our security instead of trusting God, and keeping money for ourselves that could be used to meet people's needs. The rich fool filled his barns with grain but God judged him for his greed. **Luke 12:20** The rich man in **Luke 16:19-20** could have helped Lazarus the beggar, but he didn't. Both of these men remind us of the foolishness and eternal loss of thinking only of ourselves instead of God and others.

B. In Jesus' time there were no banks so people saved their wealth in three ways: One was by keeping many fine clothes. They could always be sold in the future. A second was to store grain in barns. Famine was common in those days. If a man could keep his grain until a famine, he could sell it for a very high price. The third was to hide their gold in a pot or bury it in a field. Jesus pointed out that none of these were safe investments. Moths could eat holes in the clothes which would make them useless; rats could eat the grain; and thieves, who were called "diggers", could dig up the gold. Today we think our money and property are safer, but they can be damaged or lost in a moment. [Illustration: My German friends told me how the big bank accounts of their fathers became worthless at the end of WWII.]

C. We are to put our treasures in heaven. How do we do that? What we invest in people remains because people are eternal. The Koran says: "When a man dies, people on earth ask, what did he leave? The angels in heaven ask, what did he send ahead?" We are to put our treasure in heaven not only because the eternal will last, and the temporal will soon be worthless, but also because it gives us the right focus. Jesus did not say that our treasures follow our hearts. Our hearts will be where our treasures are. How can we cultivate a heart for God? By putting our treasures in the right place, to advance His kingdom. If we center our lives on the things of this earth, we may find leaving them difficult. [Illustration: Samuel Johnson toured a beautiful mansion. As he was leaving he said, "A place like this makes it difficult for a man to die.]"

II. Light and darkness - v. 22-24

A. Our eyes resemble lamps that illuminate the inside of us. When we close our eyes, everything inside goes dark. When we open our eyes light floods in. If we have good eyesight, the light shines in and it's bright inside of us. But if we have bad eyes everything inside becomes gray and dim. If we lose our sight, inside is like midnight. Jesus used this to symbolize our perspective on life. If our perspective is eternal we walk in light. We are not likely to stumble because we see things as they really are. If we don't see well and our perspective is temporal, we may trip over every little temptation. [Illustration: If we see from God's perspective we will know that it is better to visit the sick and help the needy than waste time and money to go to the carnival with its bright lights and loud music.]

B. Our perspective is either light or darkness. If we can't tell the difference, it's disastrous. Jesus warned that we cannot serve two masters, both light and darkness, God and money. Jesus wasn't talking about working 2 jobs. He was describing being a fulltime slave to two masters. A slave was the property of his master. A man could not be the property of two masters because he would have to put one first before the other. [Illustration: It's like trying to have two wives or two husbands.] You can serve money in reality and pretend to serve God or you can serve God and use money, but you can't serve them both. Do we serve God and use money, or serve money and use God?

C. How can we know if we are mastered by our money? First, we need to ask, how did we get it? If we gave up something eternal, or hurt someone else to get our money, it is our master. Second, we ask, what do we do with our money? Is God's kingdom advanced because we have been entrusted by Him with money? Or does God only get our spare change? [Illustration: A boy on his way to church had 2 quarters - one for a candy bar and the other for the offering. He fell and one of the quarters rolled down the street into the sewer. Later when he told about it his father asked, "Did you put the other quarter in the offering?" The boy answered, "No. God's quarter went down the sewer."] When we are short of money, do God and His work get eliminated first? What are our highest priorities? [Illustration: As a teen-ager I watched my father and stepmother while they divided up his pay into envelopes for rent, food, etc. I knew they had many bills and not enough money, but I always saw them put the first money into God's envelope. Through the years I saw the Lord take care of my father and stepmother through hard times.]

III. Worry about food & clothes - v. 25-27

A. Worry can make us sick. We may even worry ourselves to death. When we worry it affects more than our minds. We also worry with our organs. Finally we have ulcers or catch some other disease because our bodies are worn down. Worry also drives people to drugs and drinking and even suicide. Jesus begins this discussion on worry with the word "therefore". This connects it with the Lord's prayer where He told us to ask for daily bread. It also connects it with His teaching about earthly and eternal treasures. If we have double vision - looking intently on earth and trying also to look at heaven - we will stumble and fall flat on our faces. If we value what is eternal we will choose to serve God. If we commit ourselves to Him, He commits Himself to us. If we become a slave to God, He will free us from anxiety and worry.

B. Jesus did not mean here that we shouldn't think about tomorrow. The verb means "don't give anxious thought". We are not warned against forethought but against foreboding - fear and worry about what will happen. "Don't worry" doesn't mean "Don't work". Jesus used birds as an example. Birds work hard for food and shatter, but don't worry. Instead they sing! **II Thess. 3:10** God is not against working; He is against worrying.

C. The Lord whittles our needs down to what we eat, drink and wear. These are the necessities of life without which we can't live. But we usually worry about a lot of other things as

well: houses & cars, furniture & money, jobs & vacations. Life is more important than food and the body more important than clothes. Life is what is fueled by food & drink, but it's far more important than its fuel. The body is covered with clothes, but it's much more important than its covering. We desire the most delicious food for our stomachs and the best clothes for our backs, but is that really life? The birds and flowers are well taken care of. So our worrying seems pretty foolish in the light of God's care of insignificant creatures. Worrying cannot add one hour to our lives. In fact, constant worry may subtract some hours or years by causing ulcers and heart attacks.

IV. Is worry necessary? v. 28-32

A. Why do we worry? Jesus said it is because of our little faith. **6:30b; 8:25a** We have a generous & gracious heavenly Father who knows perfectly what we need. When we worry and scurry around to get what we want, we are acting like pagans - following the world's system. They "run after all these things". Materialism in this world is their treasure.

B. Seven reasons in support of a worry-free life

1. Worry is needless. When we think of God's work in creation, it makes worry totally unnecessary. If God could do the really big thing, He can surely do the little thing as well. **Isa. 46:4**

2. Worry is senseless. God is both Creator and Sustainer. He set in order the physical and moral laws, but He is also presently involved in our world. And He can overrule the laws of nature any time because He is sovereign.

3. Worrying is useless. Worry does nothing to meet our basic needs. It won't add a moment to our lives. In fact, it may shorten them. Some people always see only the dark picture. Anyone who focuses on earthly things (newspapers, TV, etc.) will find reasons to worry.

4. Worrying is faithless. Jesus compared us to grass. Grass is passing but people are permanent. We will live someplace forever. Some people have enough faith to believe that God will get them to heaven, but not enough to believe He can get them through their present problems. We are of special value to God. We see this in the sacrifice of Jesus - **Rom. 8:32**

5. Worrying is godless. The pagans worry because they can't trust their gods (demons). They never know whether they will help or hurt them. Our worry is saying that God cannot be trusted. This is a form of atheism and an insult to God. Our faith in God should make a difference in the way we handle life, trials and death.

6. Worrying denies family ties. We belong to God and His family. Jesus brought this out several times in the Sermon on the Mount:

....Your Father knows what you need.... **6:8**

....Pray "Our Father".... **6:9**

....The Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.... **6:4, 6, 18**

....Our heavenly Father feeds the birds.... **6:26**

Our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees which had to do with rituals. Ours has to do with our relationship to the heavenly Father.

7. Worry is impractical. God divided life into bite-sized chunks called days and trying to chew more than one at a time can choke us. Illustration: Ian McLaren said, "What does anxiety do? It doesn't empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but it empties today of its strength. It does not allow you to escape the evil, but renders you unfit to cope with it when it comes."

V. What should we be doing instead of worrying? v. 33-34

A.. We must seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. We need to check and maybe

change our goals. **v. 33a**

1. First, we should be working for His kingdom instead of for ourselves. To seek His kingdom is to seek His work in the world. "Seek" is the picture of a bird hunter focusing his complete attention on the bird. We make God's kingdom the center of our attention. This means we must be doing His will and reaching out to the lost and straying in our families and villages.

2. Second, we should be hungering and thirsting to become righteous as He is. To seek His righteousness is to live the kind of life that pleases Him. We need to plant this kind of life in our families by teaching and example while there is still time.

B. We must trust God and His promise: "all these things will be given to you as well" **v. 33b**. If we commit ourselves to Him, He commits Himself to us. If He cares for the needs of unbelievers He will surely take special care of His children who love Him and promote His kingdom.

C. We must live one day at a time, trusting God to take care of what's coming up **v. 34**. "Don't worry about tomorrow"; "give us this day our daily bread". This does not mean that we should not take forethought about tomorrow, but that we should not fear tomorrow. We should consider it an honor to suffer for Christ's sake. **5:11-12** We must try to understand heaven's view of suffering for the Lord. **I Pet. 4:19** Thus we should be committing ourselves to our faithful Creator and continuing to do good regardless of what we face.

IV. Does the Bible cause us to worry?

A. If worry is bad, why did Jesus & John tell us so many things about what is coming? Not so that we would worry, but that we would be prepared by learning how to trust God for each day's needs. We need to learn to seek His kingdom first while there is time. We need to mentally free ourselves of the love of things and pleasures of the world so that we don't get caught in that trap.

B. **Luke 12:32**: Luke adds that we are not to be afraid. The Father has been pleased to give us, His little flock, the kingdom! So we can freely share what we have because we are not poor. We are part of God's great & everlasting kingdom. We must remember this when we feel that we are victims. We may be victims in this world, but we are already in possession of His kingdom as His children, and that day will come when we will be part of His eternal victory.

C. How can we escape fear when there are legitimate dangers that lie all around us and more ahead of us? We need to actively apply God's Word, **I Pet. 5:7**; **Phil. 4:6**, and actively trust His promises **Phil. 4:7**; **John 14:1**. Remember that the peace of heart does not come from denying that there is trouble, but from casting all our fears and worries on the One who can carry them.

Conclusion

We are on the winning team, but it may not look like it for awhile. If we can face what is ahead with absolute assurance that we are part of God's great kingdom, full of faith in our heavenly Father instead of fear and worry, we will bring glory to God in the midst of darkness. Then unbelievers will see the evidence through us that God is real, and able to take care of those who become His children.

Bible Study
Sermon on the Mount - Part 9
Mathew 7:1-11

Introduction

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount was preaching about the attitudes that should characterize people who are part of Christ's kingdom. Unlike the Pharisees, it has nothing to do with the externals; it is an inner relationship with God that changes the heart first. For example, in **5:21** Jesus said that if we are really concerned about being righteous we must draw the line, not at murder, but at anger - and as followers of Christ we must deal with it in our lives. In **5:27** Jesus said that we should not be content because we have never committed the act of adultery. If we take Jesus seriously, we will be as concerned about hidden lust as we are about adultery.

In the first century people had oaths that mattered and oaths that didn't matter. They were like children who promise something and then say it doesn't count because they had their fingers crossed. Our biggest concern should be honesty and integrity. When we say yes, we mean yes. When we say no, we mean no. In **5:38** Jesus talked about revenge. We are not to try to get back at people but to deal with them in generosity. Finally Jesus said we are to be people of love. No matter with whom we deal, friends or enemies, we are to seek their highest good.

In chapter 6 Jesus turned His attention from principles of righteousness in relation to the Law, to the practice of righteousness in relation to religion. He talked about 3 acts of religious people. They give, they pray, they fast. We're not to do these things so that others will notice and think well of us. If we do, that's all the reward we will get. If we want a reward from God, we will do these things in quietness so that only He will know. In the middle of chapter 6 Jesus began a series of negatives: "Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth..." (**6:19**). "Do not worry about your life..." (**6:28**) And then what we study tonight: "Do not judge..." (**7:1**)

Read Matthew 7:1-11

Homework assignment: Read Matthew 7 at least once this week or more often if possible.

I. Judging others - v. 1-2

A. Sandy's website is designed to help people discern the difference between truth and error. Almost every day he has someone write to him, accusing him of being wrong in pointing out false doctrines and false teachers. They always use **Matt. 7:1** to back their criticisms of what He's doing. They say that we are told here by Jesus that we must not judge others. This shows that they don't really understand what Jesus means here. If they would read just 14 verses later they would find Him saying, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." How can we watch out for false prophets who are disguised as innocent sheep if we do not make a judgment about the prophets and their messages?

B. [Illustration: A pastor found out that the treasurer of his church was living in adultery. When he asked the man if it was true, the treasurer admitted it and said he was not going to change. Next the pastor and an elder went to him, pointing out the damage his sin was doing. He refused to change. They called the man to appear before all the church leaders. He told them that he didn't intend to change. Finally, the church excommunicated him. He then went around the community accusing the pastor and the church of being unchristian because they were judging him. He used **Matt. 7:1** to prove his point.] Perhaps there is no verse in the Bible that is more familiar, more misunderstood, and more misapplied than this one.

C. Part of the problem is deciding what is meant by judging. It can have a multitude of meanings.

Is it wrong to judge a cake-baking contest? Is it sinful to evaluate someone who applies for a job? Part of the Lord's prayer was about forgiveness. What Jesus meant here by judging is the opposite of forgiveness. The Greek word here means "to assume the office of a judge". It is the picture of someone standing in judgment on others as if he were better or superior. Jesus was saying that as His followers we must not have a spirit of condemnation or harsh criticism - a spirit that puts other people down. The reason we criticize people, pointing out their faults, is that we think by putting them down we can build ourselves up.

D. When we make judgments about other people, what is our attitude? Is it an attitude that shows concern for the person and a desire to restore him? Or is it an attitude that wants to use her fall as a step to raise ourselves? Jesus said that the measure we use will be measured to us. If we judge with an attitude of putting people down, God will put us down. If we judge with an attitude of helping others, God will help us. If a man commits adultery we know he has sinned, but what about the TV we watch, our reading, our thoughts? If we have coworkers who lie, how are we to respond.? We can't say lying doesn't matter; it does matter. If we are concerned about their lies, are we equally concerned about our own? Do we change facts in our stories to make ourselves look good? Do we cheat on our income taxes?

II. Specks and planks - v. 3-5

A. Jesus gave an exaggerated illustration to help us get the point about not standing in judgment on others. It is the picture of a person with a tiny speck of sawdust in his eye, which of course can hurt and irritate. The critic comes along and offers to remove the speck, but a log or plank sticks out of his eye. He can hardly see. It almost sounds like a cartoon. But in life it comes close to reality. [Illustration: God sent Nathan the prophet to King David after he had committed adultery and murder. When Nathan told David about a rich man who stole a sheep, David was very angry. The king had a tender conscience about stealing sheep, but not about stealing wives. He was trying to remove a speck from someone's eye when he had a big log in his own. Fortunately, David acknowledged his sin and repented.] [Illustration: A businessman was very carefully keeping track of the petty cash box. He required the employees to account for every penny taken. But then he went to prison when it was discovered that he had embezzled/stolen hundreds of thousands of dollars from his corporation. He wanted others to be accountable when he was not.]

B. Jesus was not saying that sin in other people's lives is unimportant. He just pointed out how ridiculous it is to be worried about others' specks when we have planks. The word "hypocrite" is close to our word for "actor". Jesus called this kind of judgment hypocrisy because it pretends to show a concern for righteousness. If we are really concerned about sin, and we ought to be, we will first be concerned about our own. To be concerned about another person's sin and not our own is to playact religion. When we let God operate on the sin in our lives, that changes the way we deal with people. We can encourage others to repent because we know personally the agony of sin and the relief of God's forgiveness. [Illustration: Oswald Sanders wrote: "What God has done for me, He can easily do for you. You have only some sawdust in your eye, but I had a huge log in mine."] Gal. 6:1

III. Dogs and pigs - v. 6

A. [Illustration: In the 1700s missionaries from the London Missionary Society faced many problems and temptations in the South Pacific. In Tonga, other Europeans who were living an evil lifestyle tried to undermine the work of the missionaries by mocking them for their sexual purity. One of them, George Veeson, couldn't stand the pressure. He gave in and joined them, taking land, servants and a harem of wives. He disgraced

himself, the London Missionary Society, and God.] Jesus warned us about giving in to temptations in **v. 6**. We are not to throw our lives to the world, bringing humiliation and scorn on ourselves. The dogs in Bible times were not cuddly creatures. They were more like wild animals than pets. The temple in Jerusalem, although a beautiful structure, was more like a slaughterhouse. The Jewish people who came to worship brought animals to be sacrificed to God. At the end of the day, not all sacrificial meat had been consumed. If they put it in the garbage heap, wild dogs would spend the night ripping it up and eating it. The priests took great care to burn the meat and bury it so scavengers wouldn't get it. [Illustration: How do we get rid of old flags or old Bibles? We have to destroy them in some way that doesn't desecrate them.]

B. Like dogs and temples, first century pigs were different than the plump, well-scrubbed Miss Piggys we think of today. They were half-wild creatures more like wild boars. Knowing this, it's not hard to figure out that Jesus was warning us not to give something sacred and valuable to those who don't recognize its value. But why did Jesus talk about this subject at this point in His Sermon? When He was talking about dogs and pigs, whom did He have in mind? We get some help from Bible references to dogs and pigs. **Psa. 22:16** David sees the Lord on the cross surrounded by a pack of savage dogs, ready to jump and tear their victim apart. **Phil. 3:2** Paul calls evil men "dogs". In **II Peter 2** Peter is writing about false teachers and their destruction. He compares them to dogs that return to their vomit and pigs that return to their mud. **2:20-22** Evidently Jesus was talking about people who were in opposition to His message.

C. The final petition in the Lord's Prayer is: "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one." Satan appears as an angel of light. Satan's finished product is often a church deacon or Christian who lives a righteous-looking life, but doesn't really trust and obey God. We can appear holy and actually be following the evil one inwardly. Jesus was concerned that we not turn our backs on the Lord and give what is sacred - our lives - to dogs; that we not take what is precious - our relationship with God - and throw it to pigs who will tear us apart. [Illustration: We need to be very discerning and able to judge those who preach and teach. Do they honor the Lord and His Word or are they actually dogs and pigs as described in the Bible?] Have you ever tried to witness to someone who told you all about the sins of a so-called Christian, and used that person as an excuse not to follow Christ? This shows us the danger of throwing our precious life and testimony to the dogs. How do we protect ourselves? By a constant dependence on the Father in heaven. He will protect us from the enemy who tries to separate us from Him. "Deliver us from the evil one."

IV. Asking, seeking and knocking - v. 7-11

A. The price of victory against the enemy is constant vigilance. That's why Jesus urges us to be persistent in prayer. He urges us to persevere. Ask, seek and knock are 3 different ways of talking about prayer. In **Jer. 29:12-13** asking and seeking have to do with finding the will of God. The English in **v. 7** doesn't accurately express the continuous action of these 3 verbs. We are to keep on asking and it will be given to us. Keep on seeking and we will find. Keep on knocking and the door will be opened. The emphasis is not merely on prayer but persistence in prayer. [Illustration: Any great athlete or musician knows that you must persist in your practising in order to do well. Magic Johnson didn't become the NBA's most valuable player by shooting baskets only when the weather was nice.]

B. Why should we persist in prayer? Is it because we have to persuade God to do something He doesn't want to? Jesus says we are to persist because God has promised to answer. "Everyone who asks receives". The word "everyone" is not a blanket promise that covers the world. It is limited by the context, as are many other promises in the Bible. When Jesus introduced this section on prayer in chapter 6, He pointed to the hypocrites who prayed for show in the synagogues and on the street corners. **(6:5)** He made it clear

that God owes them nothing. He also described the pagans who babble the same thing over and over. **(6:7)** They persist at it, but that kind of useless repetition has no effect on the true God. "Everyone" here refers to the true disciples of Christ who make Him the Lord of their lives. They persist in prayer because they believe God answers and they want what God wants for them. **John 15:7; John 15:16**

C. If God has committed Himself to answer our prayers, isn't that dangerous? We might ask for foolish things, or worse, things that would destroy us. Jesus assures us that God is a good Father who will give us only good gifts. Would a human father give his son a stone instead of bread? All over Israel there are small white stones that have the same shape and color as small loaves of bread. Would a father give his child a snake when he asked for a fish? A snake could harm his child and it isn't food like fish is. Our heavenly Father is willing to answer our prayers and wise enough to give us what we need. We often don't know what to ask for, but God knows what we need. That's why we can confidently pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

D. [Illustration: A writer had a baby who was always waking up in the middle of the night. He would go to her bedroom and ask, "What do you want?" "I want my bear." He would search for the bear and give it to her, then she would throw it on the floor. He would try again, "Tell Daddy what you want." "I want my dolly." He would look for the dolly and give it to her. Soon it would be on the floor beside the bear. Meanwhile his wife would be warming a bottle in the kitchen. As soon as it was in Vicki's mouth she was satisfied. She was hungry but she was too young to know what would satisfy her.] When we give our requests to God, we can ask Him for things we think we really want, and be sure that He will not give us something that will hurt us. We can trust the absolute wisdom and love of our Father. Why does it seem sometimes that God isn't answering our prayers?

E. We know that God will give us good gifts because of His character - He is a good God. We are inherently evil, so we do not always give our children what they really need.

[Illustration: A wealthy and influential man was bitterly disappointed with his son. He had been caught selling drugs and was given a ten year prison sentence. The father said, "I've given him everything he asked for. I think that is what destroyed him." The father loved his son, but he was foolish. He gave the boy his heart's desire, but his son was destroyed by the gifts.] Since we are evil we make those kind of mistakes. But God doesn't. When we knock, a Father, not a servant, opens the door. What do all children need most? They need a father's love and care. God knows that we need bread and fish to eat, but what we really need is God Himself. As we spend time with Him in persistent prayer we will not only tell Him our needs, but we will get to know Him better.

Conclusion

A wise man wrote:

I asked for strength that I might achieve; He made me weak that I might obey.
I asked for health that I might do great things; He gave me grace that I might do better things.
I asked for riches that I might be happy; He did not give them so that I might be wise.
I asked for power that I might have the praise of men; I was given weakness that I might feel a need of God.
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life; I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.
I received very few of the things that I asked for; but I received the things that I had hoped for.

Bible Study
Sermon on the Mount - Part 10
Matthew 7:12-23

Introduction

The whole Sermon on the Mount is about righteousness. In the key verse - **5:20** - Jesus said that unless our righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, we will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. Again and again Jesus referred to our Father in heaven, making it clear that we can only be righteous through a relationship with God in which we become His children and He becomes our Father. God Himself has made this possible by sending His Son to die in our place.

Jesus teaches us in this Sermon that true righteousness is not just what we see on the surface. We cannot condemn others for murder or adultery if we are full of anger or lust. Jesus said that doing our acts of righteousness - giving, praying and fasting - to be seen and admired by men will make them actually acts of self-righteousness and pride. We cannot worship God that way, and the only praise we will receive is the praise of men. God owes us nothing. If we have a relationship with the Father, we will lay up treasure in heaven and not try to serve both God and money. As children of the heavenly Father we do not need to worry. He who takes care of the birds and flowers will surely take care of us.

Those who are righteous because of their relationship with the Father will not be judging other people's sins when they have the same sins in their lives. Nor will they throw their precious relationship to the pigs and dogs who are evil men who don't know the true value of sacred things. Our Father encourages us to keep on asking, keep on seeking and keep on knocking because He is a good Father who loves to give good gifts to His children.

Read Matthew 7:12-23

Homework assignment: Next week our last lesson on the Sermon deals with putting into practice the words of Jesus. During this week, think about some of His words from the Sermon on the Mount that have touched your heart, and decide how you will put them into practice. If you want to, tell us next week what you have decided.

I. The Golden Rule - v. 12

A. [Illustration]: Donald Trump is a very rich and greedy man. He said, "I love to have enemies. I fight my enemies. I like beating my enemies to the ground." This evil way is the opposite of Jesus' famous statement which is known around the world as the Golden Rule. This rule goes back, in one form or another, to centuries before Christ. Isocrates, a Greek philosopher, used it 500 years before Christ. Confucius, who lived in the Far East 500 years before Christ, taught it. However, outside of the Bible it is usually stated negatively. [Illustration]: A pagan man once approached a Jewish rabbi. He said, "I will convert to your religion if you can sum up your law while I am standing on one leg." The rabbi Hillel answered, "What is hateful to yourself, do not do to others." Confucius said, "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others." Sometimes this is called the silver rule. What is the difference between the Golden Rule of Jesus and the silver rule of Confucius and others? Don't just stop doing bad things! Do good things!

B. Jesus introduced the Golden Rule with "therefore" or "so". It refers us back to earlier teaching in the Sermon. For instance, Jesus said in **5:44-45**, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven." According to the Golden Rule we are to start with ourselves. We are to ask ourselves how we want the other person to treat us. I want the other person to be kind to me; therefore, I will be kind. We are to take the initiative. Jesus said that living by the Golden Rule sums up the Law and the Prophets. Let's see how that is true. **Exodus 23:9** The Israelites should know how to treat outsiders because they were outsiders in Egypt. If you have ever been

an outsider, you will know how outsiders would like to be treated. **Exodus 23:4** I don't own an ox but if I did and it were lost, I would want the person who found it to return it to me. Shouldn't I then return the wallet that I find? **Exodus 23:5** What would you do if you saw your enemy's donkey fallen under its load? What would you want him to do if it were your car that was stalled?

C. The principle is a very practical application of the rule of love. It is active, not passive; positive, not negative. [Illustration: In the story of the Good Samaritan that Jesus told, there was a man who robbed and beat up a traveler and left him to die. A priest and a Levite came along. They didn't harm the man but they also didn't help him. They practiced the silver rule. The Samaritan practiced the Golden Rule. If I were the victim, I wouldn't care who helped me - Jew or Samaritan.] We should not just help others because they have helped us. God has helped us when we didn't deserve it. We have to be careful that we don't misuse the Golden Rule. For instance, we flatter others because we like to be flattered. That's a dishonest way of living. Or if we are a jury member we let the guilty person go free because we would want to go free. That's not righteous living. The Golden Rule has to be understood in the context of the Law, the Prophets and the whole Sermon on the Mount.

D. The Golden Rule is a guide not a goal. Jesus was not saying that we should be nice to others so they will be nice to us. In **5:11** Jesus warned us that people may take advantage of us, slander us and persecute us if we live righteous lives because we are different. Then why should we follow the Golden Rule? Because we live for the approval of our heavenly Father. We do not take our lead from the crowd, but from our relationship to the Father. In the Beatitudes, **5:3-12**, Jesus isn't telling us to turn over a new leaf like people say at New Year's. He was saying that that kind of righteousness demands a new life.

II. The narrow and wide - v. 13-14

A. What distinguishes us from one another are the choices we make. Most people desperately want to be successful, but when life is over, they feel they have failed. We often blame our parents, the environment where we grew up, or other factors. We are what we are committed to. Again and again biblical leaders called people to choose. Moses preached 5 sermons before he died. This was his theme: **Deut. 30:19-20**. Listening to Moses was a soldier named Joshua. He took up the leadership of the people and led them in the conquering of the land. In his farewell sermon he also called people to choose: **Josh. 24:15**. Jesus' preaching makes us nervous because He, too, was asking for a decision. [Illustration: A lady was not seeing well and went to the doctor to get new glasses. He discovered cancer behind her eye and wouldn't even let her go home. He put her in the hospital, removed the cancer and treated her with radium. She wanted glasses, but ended up with radical surgery.] This is what Jesus does. We don't get His kind of righteousness with new glasses. We need major surgery.

B. Jesus pictured here at the end of His sermon two gates, two ways, two trees, and two foundations. Travelers must choose their way; hearers their message; and builders, their foundation. There are two ways and two gates, not three. Jesus here gives a direct command: "Enter!" We are to enter the narrow gate and travel the narrow road. But maybe we don't want to be thought of as narrow. [Illustration: Children don't like the narrowness of arithmetic. Only one answer is right. 3×3 always equals 9, not 8 or 10.] [Illustration: Marriage is narrow, too. The wedding ceremony says, "Henry, will you take Agnes to be your lawful wedded wife, will you comfort her, cherish her, cling to her; forsaking all others, will you take her alone?" Of all the women on earth Henry chooses Agnes only.] Some people don't like that kind of narrow commitment. That's why there are broken homes. The way is narrow; the gate is narrow; the truth is narrow; our relationship with God is narrow. This narrowness is unpopular. That's why Jesus said,

“Only a few find it.” If you are going on the road with the crowd, you know you’re not on the narrow way.

C. Going with the crowd is not the way to determine what really matters. [Illustration: Sandy will be teaching us about the nature of Jesus. Athanasius was one of the church fathers at the time when there was a great religious debate about the nature of Jesus. It almost split the church. Today we know that Athanasius was right when he said that Jesus is God, but in his day he stood almost alone for the truth.] If we don’t like to be called narrow, why do we choose the narrow road? Alexander McCartney said, “The main thing about a road is where it goes.” Jesus said the broad road leads to destruction. It may be wide with lovely scenery, but do we want to let the crowd decide our direction, and be destroyed with them?

D. Jesus said that only one road leads to life. We choose it - not for its comfort or because many others are on it, but for its destination. As we travel this narrow road we find that people who are on it are not narrow. They are broad in their sympathies - doing good to those who misuse them, and praying for their enemies. They are broad in their purposes - living for the kingdom of God and His eternal goals. They are broad in their hopes because they know that death is not the end of the road. For people on the narrow road, the best is yet to come. But to get on this road, we have to make a choice. We don’t stumble on it by accident. [Illustration: Charles Colson was not a Christian when he read C.S. Lewis’s book “Mere Christianity”. He wrote afterwards, “I could not sidestep the central question Lewis (and God) had placed squarely before me. Was I to accept without reservations Jesus Christ as Lord of my life? It was like a gate before me. There was no way to walk around it. I would step through, or I would remain outside.”]

III. False prophets - v. 15-23

A. [Illustration: Years ago the Metropolitan Museum of Art put some of their priceless originals next to copies. They had a contest to see how many visitors could tell the false from the true. Of the 1827 people who took part in the experiment only 7 were able to tell the genuine from the counterfeit.] What is true of paintings is true of prophets and teachers. In our society we usually go by our senses. If an animal looks like a sheep, sounds like a sheep, and is covered with wool, it is probably a sheep; but not necessarily. It may be a clever wolf. Like a wolf in sheep’s clothing, true and false prophets share many features in common. How can we tell them apart?

1. We cannot identify true prophets by the way they dress. They may or may not wear a robe or black suit, a cross around their necks, and carry a Bible. They may have been ordained by some denomination or gone to college and seminary.

2. Nor can we identify true prophets by their works, no matter how miraculous. **v. 21-23** Just because someone heals the sick does not mean that he or she is a true prophet.

3. Religious vocabulary is not a reliable test of true prophets either. The false prophets said they did their miracles in Jesus’ name, and they called Him “Lord, Lord”. But Jesus said He never knew them. Just because a preacher on television speaks the name of Jesus does not necessarily mean he is a prophet of God. He may be the prophet of another power, using the right words to get across the wrong message.

4. It is disturbing to know that we cannot identify true prophets by their sincerity. Some may be dishonest and know that they are spreading lies in the name of God. Others, however, may be so personally deceived that they think they are doing the right thing. They build churches, raise money, and preach sermons in a

sincere way, but they are sincerely wrong. These are the ones who will be shocked when they stand before God to discover that the God they thought they were serving did not even know them.

B. So how do we identify the true prophets of God? Jesus says twice (**v. 16 & 20**), "By their fruit you will recognize them." Sometimes we think of fruit as good works. This cannot be what Jesus was teaching because the Pharisees had lots of "good works" and Jesus said in the key verse that they could not enter the kingdom. Some people in the world do good deeds and they aren't even Christians. The fruit of an orange tree is an orange. The fruit of mango tree is a mango. The fruit of a prophet is prophecy. The primary question about a prophet is whether or not his teaching is true to the Word of God. Is the word of the prophet the same as what Jesus preached in His Sermon? Jesus described the true sheep in **John 10:3 & 14**. A true sheep hears the voice of the Shepherd and knows Him. That's where the true prophet's messages come from - from the Shepherd.

C. The test of a prophet was always whether or not he spoke for God accurately. A true prophet teaches what Jesus taught. He tells us that we stand before God bankrupt. We have something radically wrong deep inside us. A true prophet makes us aware of the depths of sin in our lives. This awareness causes us to mourn about our sin. This mourning leads us to hunger and thirst for righteousness. True prophets don't tell us how to dress or wear our hair. They deal with what we are inwardly which is what we are before God. So when we give, fast, pray or worship, we don't do it to impress the minister, the deacons or our mate. We do it because our Father who sees in secret will reward us.

D. But how do we know that there are false teachers and prophets today that we need to identify and stay away from? Here Jesus says, "Watch out for false prophets". He gave us a more severe warning in **Matt. 24:4-5, 10-11, 24-25** Jesus has warned us ahead of time. Notice in these verses that the word "deceive" is used 4 times. That's why Jesus pictures them as ferocious wolves looking like innocent sheep. Ferocious wolves are a serious enemy of sheep. They can tear them apart and destroy them. And when they are disguised as "fellow sheep" or "brothers in the faith" they can do great damage to those who are not discerning and wise about what is true and what is false.

E. Why do people believe and follow preachers they are not sure of? It's because they do not want to hear "sound doctrine" - the preaching of the Word. They prefer to hear made up stories and supposed experiences that people have had. **II Tim. 4:2-4; II Pet. 2:1-3** These false teachers introduce destructive heresies which deny the Lord, and by doing that they bring the way of truth into disrepute. People today are confused about the gospel because of all the heresies that are being taught. And unbelievers don't want to become Christians because of the crazy things they're doing and the false things they're teaching. Notice that they make money with the "stories they have made up". Twice Peter talks about their greed (**v. 3 & 14**) Peter and Jude both describe the false teachers of today as empty and fruitless. **II Peter 2:17-18; Jude 1:12-13** Jesus said that we will recognize false prophets by their fruit. Peter calls them springs that promise water but don't give any, mouthing empty, boastful words. Jude says that they are clouds that don't give rain, trees without fruit, wild waves of the sea, and wandering stars. Paul writes to Titus that they claim to know God but don't. **Titus 1:16**

Conclusion

A soul is a dangerous thing to lose. We had better be careful whom we listen to, whom we watch, and what we read. Some who seem like gentle sheep may be hungry wolves who have been empowered by the devouring lion called Satan.

Bible Study
Sermon on the Mount - Part 11
Matthew 7:24-29

Introduction

Jesus ends this amazing Sermon on the Mount by calling us to make some choices. The first one is to decide what gate we will enter and what road we will travel. The narrow road may seem hard but it leads to life. If we travel with the crowd on the broad road it will lead us to destruction. The second choice is whether we want to eat good fruit or bad fruit. False teachers produce bad fruit, and they will be sent away from Jesus forever. If we eat their bad fruit, we might also be sent away. Jesus finished His sermon by telling a parable about building. Since he grew up as a carpenter, we can see why He would talk about building houses. He closes His sermon by telling us that we have to choose how we will build our house or life. **Read Matt. 7:15-27**

I. The reason for this parable - 7:15-23

A. [Illustration: In 1938 a hurricane and tidal wave struck the east coast of Connecticut where I was living as a child. The Weather Bureau gave warning that a hurricane was headed our way and that it was likely to spawn a tidal wave. The resort shores of our state were crowded with houses and cottages. Some people heeded the warning, and left the shoreline for safety. Others laughed at the foolish weather people because no such thing had ever been experienced in the history of Connecticut. The tidal wave swept the shoreline clean of cottages and expensive mansions, along with quite a few people who disregarded the warning. Within 2 years of the devastating storm people were once again building on the sand of the shoreline. My grandfather tried to advise them not to build expensive homes in the very place where they had been swept away. But few listened. A couple of years later another hurricane hit and many of those houses were destroyed.] It's amazing how foolish we people can be. How well do we listen to words of warning? Can you remember words that you wish you had listened to and followed? Is God cruel to warn us about hell? Is a mother cruel for spanking her child for running out into the street or into the deep water? A disobedient child can be badly hurt or die.

B. **Luke 6:46** It's easy to call Him Lord. It's not so easy to do what He says! But is He really Lord if we don't do what He says. Jesus said that many people are foolish enough to think that they are in God's kingdom when they're not. Who will enter God's kingdom? Only the one who does His will. Doing His will is doing what he says. Some will not only call Him "Lord, Lord". They will also be able to point to: prophecies they have made in His name; driving out of demons in His name; performing miracles in His name.

If people use the name of Jesus to do special things, does that prove that they are in His kingdom? As we get closer to the end we will hear more and more false prophecies from counterfeit prophets, and see more and more miracles performed in Jesus' name by people who don't even know Him. We must learn to be discerning. **Mark 13:5-6, 21-23** Notice the many warnings: "Watch out...You must be on your guard...So be on your guard...Be on your guard! Be alert!...Therefore keep watch....What I say to you I say to everyone: Watch!"

C. How do we tell that they didn't know Him? Jesus will say plainly, "I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!" They didn't do the good they claimed. They did evil! How do we get to really know the Lord? We begin to know Him at the new birth, but we need to continue learning about Him through Bible studies, prayer and meeting together. We prove that we know Him by doing what He has taught us to do in the Bible. How can we discern now whether they know Him or not? Jesus said, "By their fruit you will recognize them". Since they are messengers, their fruit is their message. If their message is not firmly based on the Word of God, we know they are false teachers.

II. A look at the wise man - 7:24-25

A. Jesus tells the parable of the wise & foolish builders. How can we identify which people are wise and which are foolish? Is it enough to call Him "Lord" and sound religious? Jesus gives us the answer: "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord', and do not do what I say?"

What is the definition of a wise man? **Luke 6:47** 3 things: 1) He comes to Me; 2) He hears My words; 3) He puts them into practice. Sometimes we think it's enough to come. It's no good to come if we don't really listen. And it's no good to listen if we don't do something about what we hear. The question is: Do we put His words into practice?

B. What is the picture of a wise man? **Luke 6:48** 2 things: 1) He dug deep; 2) He laid the foundation on a rock. He didn't take the easy way out. He worked hard and put all his heart into building a strong house. Who is the Rock? How do we dig deep? How do we lay the foundation on the Rock? (the house is our life) What is most important in our lives? That's our foundation.

C. What was the result of the wise man's efforts? The flood came; the torrent struck the house but could not shake it because it was well built. Storms test houses and lives. What kind of storms hit our houses that we build (our lives)? Floods of disappointment, evil, sorrow, abuse, hatred, financial & material needs, false doctrines? Will we stand true because we are solidly based on a real vital relationship with Christ the Rock? **Mark 13:13** If we are, we will be doing what He says - doing the Father's will - in our lives.

III. A look at the foolish man - 7:26-27

A. How is the foolish man described? 2 things: The first is just like the wise man: 1) He hears My words; 2) He does not put them into practice. Many people hear the Bible on a regular basis, but just hearing will not qualify us for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. If we think that way, we are called fools by Jesus. The Pharisees were fools because although they were experts in the Law they didn't really apply it to their lives. They ended up crucifying Jesus because they didn't love the Father or His Son. Going through the motions will not be enough.

B. What is the picture of a foolish man? 2 things: 1) He didn't dig at all; 2) He built his house on the ground (or sand) without a foundation. It was the fast and easy way to build. His house was probably built long before the other one. Some people want power from God the easy way. They want to just call out to get whatever gift God may have for them. But when we seek a quick fix, there are also demons ready to give us gifts. That's why these people Jesus talked about could do miracles, etc. They did them by the power of demons. Jesus' way is never the easy way. He expects us to diligently study our Bibles, live out what He teaches us and serve Him faithfully. He will empower us as we are willing to die to ourselves and pay the price of true discipleship.

C. What was the result of the foolish man's carelessness? He got a quick house, but he also got a quick destruction of his house. **Luke 6:49** says, "The moment the torrent struck the house"! When the rain, the flood and the tidal wave came, there was nothing to hold the house and it collapsed. "Its destruction was complete." If we build on the false teachings of men, or on our own ability or power, we will ultimately experience that complete destruction - not only for ourselves, but for everyone else who has found shelter in "our house". We cannot afford to be careless builders.

Conclusion

My grandfather saw the foolishness of men who refused to listen and act on words of warning. They insisted on pleasing themselves, doing their own thing the fast and easy way. Some lost their lives; others lost valuable property. But far more serious is the blunder of those who build their lives on false

teaching or false teachers, only to find them swept away into eternal night when Jesus says the terrible words, " I never knew you. Depart from Me." Will we build our lives on Jesus Christ? Will we come to Him, hear His words and then put them into practice as the wise man did? Tell us your plans to do this with what we have studied from the Sermon on the Mount.