



Sermon on the Mount

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Gospel of Matthew Chapters 5, 6, & 7

Mrs. Bledsoe, Mrs. Sitton, and Mrs. O'Neal are three memorable teachers of my childhood. They were my 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade teachers and bless their hearts, how they ever took a rambunctious boy straight off the farm, free booting and running wild on the cotton and grain fields of the high plains to settle him down for a full day of educational instruction had to be a feat of great proportions. *(At least in the eyes of my mother)* They were all old ladies, and I don't mean old because I was young, simply put they were just old ladies. *(No disrespect intended)* Silver and white haired, worn faces heavy with wrinkles of laughter and tears, full of the struggles of years gone by. These women became my springboard into the world of educational instruction. It was here I learned the basics, those foundational points upon which all aspects of academic

instruction would be based. Numbers and letters became a virtual feast to a never ending appetite. I learned to form words and sentences and to be able to express thoughts in print and in cursive writing. In my mind I still remember their handwriting that was so beautiful and mine so crude and often undecipherable *(still to this day haven't mastered penmanship)*. I learned the building blocks of mathematics, adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing all of which provide the foundation of all existing mathematics. Numbers became an unwavering truth, nothing ambiguous, nothing left to interpretation, and the answer was either right or wrong. I loved math with its clean crisp rules, but they had to teach me a love for language, grammar, and literature which at times in my mind was based upon feelings and interpretation rather than concrete rules that

(Continued on page 2)

Table Of Contents

Intro & Mt 5:1-12	1
Russ Ward	
Mt 5:13-20	5
Craig Sweet	
Mt 5:21-32	7
Aaron Lumpkin	
Mt 5:33-48	8
Mark Gray	
Mt 6:1-4; 16-18	10
Phil Lumpkin	
Mt 6:5-15	11
Steven Baxley	
Mt 6:19-34	13
Ron Gray	
Mt 7:1-12	15
Carol Fertig	
Mt 7:13-23	18
Trey Haskett	
Mt 7:24-29	19
Ephriam Davis	

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could be set before you. In time they were able to instill a love to know, to seek out, to search, to find, and to understand the joy, comfort, and pleasures that comes to a person who has the capacity to read, write, comprehend, and calculate.

In this issue, Christ has reached that stepping out point in His life upon this earth to begin His ministry with earnest, to prepare the people for what was to come, to remind them of who God is, what His desires are for those who would draw near to Him, and what manner of people we ought to be. Spiritually speaking we are going through 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade all over again and the Master Teacher comes to us and says listen to me and I will show you the building blocks of righteousness. **(Matt. 5:2-12 ... Matt. 7:12-14, 24-27)** I don't want your actions, I want your heart and those actions that spring from a heart that is in tune with God. **(Matt. 5:13-16, 21-48... Matt. 7:1-6, 21-23)** Where is your glory, is it in the things you do, or the one you do it for, and whose favor do you seek in doing them? **(Matt. 6:1-4, 16-18)** Who do you trust, where is comfort found if not in God, who can you go to with assurance that you will be heard and that you will receive an answer? **(Matt. 6:5-15, 19-34.. Matt. 7:7-11)** We try to make things so difficult when the Master Teacher in short time and with limited words spreads before us a never ending feast of love, trust, and practical application for our lives upon this earth. *"This is My beloved son, hear ye Him."* Matt. 17:5



Matthew 5:2-11 "Beatitudes"

Russ Ward

"Blessed are...." Is a series of statements from Christ, commonly referred to as the *"Beatitudes"* and recorded

in what is primarily known as the “Sermon on the Mount” These statements provide the foundation of the lessons given and in truth reflect the changes in heart and attitude that a believer in God must have to be favorable in His sight. We often find ourselves replacing blessed with happy to help us grasp what Christ was attempting to say, which when you take a moment to reflect on these statements we find that probably is not a good synonymous choice, yet the problem is there just really is not a true synonymous replacement word for the thoughts and intent presented by Jesus. In truth blessed here encompasses not only thoughts of happiness but also those of longing, contentment, and understanding. As Christ begins his message to the multitudes he speaks to them as no one has spoken to them in the past. His approach and message provide a foundation that upon initial approach seem contradictory in nature to their time and to their current instruction by the leaders of their day, yet when compiled together provide a level of comfort and hope to those who would *draw near to God in heart.*

“Blessed are the Poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.” Matt 5:3 Did not the teachers of the day claim that prosperity was an extension of God’s favor and an extension in righteousness? Yet here Christ states that heavenly riches, glory, and honor belong to those who are lowly in spirit, those not puffed up in pride and self-righteousness, these are the true citizens of the Kingdom.

“Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Matt5:4 How can there be joy or satisfaction in mourning? What type of mourning would elicit such a statement?

Yet Jesus’ voice rings out clearly that those who are grieved by the effects of sin, not only theirs but that of others, have truly understood the state of mankind. The sorrow of the world works death (*1 Cor. 7:10*), yet consolation and comfort from Jehovah are bestowed upon those whose heart is touched in such a manner as this.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Matt 5:5 How can this be? Are we to think the mild and gentle will overcome the arrogant, the selfish and the proud who so often reign over men? Yet *“power under control”* does just that. It is the strength to stand when no one else will. It is the fire that burns within that the ungodly and the unrighteous of earth cannot prevail against. It is what sustains the humble and righteous, and allows them to enjoy the temporal blessing of this earth and the triumphant blessing of those to come.

“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” Matt 5:6 Finally something that makes perfect sense. Often one finds what one seeks if he looks long enough. Yet within the context of these other statements there is a sense that deeper thought is needed than what is provided on the surface. Not all who seek find, often searching in the wrong place or in the wrong manner. The Jews sought righteousness through the eyes of man being puffed up with a false sense of understanding regarding their actions for Jehovah. Christ saw them for what they were and in the same sense knows those who seek to be filled for the right reasons

(Continued on page 4)

and in the right manner. In this manner Jehovah God has provided for us that which is necessary to be filled and overflowing with righteousness.

“Blessed are the Merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” Matt 5:7 This line of reasoning is still outside of how the world operates. Justice is what is needed, not mercy. Does Jesus not know that those who break the law are guilty of the law and its condemnation? Is he unaware that there is no tolerance or mercy to be shown to those who are under guilt? The problem is we never seem to place ourselves within the realm of those under guilt. Christ is clear in His teaching; mercy is shown to the merciful; which is seen not only physically but spiritually as well. The one who shows mercy proves himself to be a man whose heart belongs to God, one who recognizes that he himself is unworthy, yet rejoices in the mercifulness of God and God’s Grace and in turn bestows that on his fellow man. To the Jew of the day, one’s situation in life was reflective of his/her righteousness or lack thereof; pride, arrogance, haughtiness, and self-righteousness directed the leaders and teachers of the Jewish nation. Mercy was not shown for those who should have given it for they did not see themselves as having a need of the same kind of mercy that first should have been given by them.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Matt 5:8 The pure in heart are those who are without guile, sincere in their love for God and man alike and who express such in their lives. It is the heart that repels and loathes every sinful thing, and is that which guards oneself from evil desires and purposes. Regardless of times or tradi-

tions this message could not be lost upon the hearers. Their rich history and their law time and time again drew upon the fact that those who would be near Jehovah would have hearts such as his (**David**) and that his acceptance of them was dependent upon such a heart of obedience. Yet even in hearing these things, how easy is it to slide into a routine of service and following of law without expressing the full intent that was found within those words given. Godliness was proclaimed in outwardly forms rather than allowing inward godliness to direct the outward actions of individuals. Hypocrisy was so prevalent, so much a part of Jewish lives, that even upon hearing something so simplistic in nature that the truth found therein was probably lost upon the multitude.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” Matt 5:9 In a time of great conflict, oppression, and unrest this teaching did not fall within the mindset of the Jew at the time of Christ. Zealots were in opposition, turmoil was a continuum in their region politically and the longing for the delivering messiah to come that would restore the kingdom and deliver them from these offensive gentiles was ever on their minds. Yet Christ provides a challenging statement: consider it in reverse, to be called a son of God one would have to be a peacemaker. This was not a deviation from law rather it was the full extension of it in application. The Law provided the means for men to live peaceably with each other, yet peace could not be found within or without the Jewish nation. The conflict with gentiles outwardly was as severe as the oppression

(Continued on page 5)

placed upon fellow Jews in the binding of law and tradition. Peace was nowhere to be found and as such the longing for the Messiah at this time could be equated to the longings of the Israelites for deliverance from Egyptian bondage. If we take a moment though and consider the flow of Christ's previous thoughts, does not peacemaking come from the poor in spirit, the meek, the pure in heart, and the one who diligently seeks God?

"Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake." Matt 5:10-11 What do you mean for your sake? Who are you and why would anyone suffer for you? This final thought by Christ pulls all of the previous ones together. Those who seek true righteousness will receive persecution because they do so for His sake. Christ establishes the truth about who He is and how His followers were to be and what they would experience. Victory for Christ would be different than victory of the world. It will require a different warrior with a different mindset. It will require one to set aside those predispositions established by the world and the fallacies of the traditions of the Jewish leaders, and in so doing it will in turn open the individual to intense persecution. The question jumps to their mind as it does ours when reading the word; why would I ever do such a thing? And the response, ***"...For theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven"***.



Matthew 5:13-20
Relationship to the World
Craig Sweet

One of the last things I do before I turn in for the night is turn out the lights. We each can recall those few moments when a room goes from light to complete darkness and our eyes have not yet adjusted. We can barely see anything. And then, as our eyes adjust, we see this tiny light coming from the bedroom where we are headed. It can be the tiniest of lights, but it provides a path to lead our way and gives us direction to where we need to go, preventing us from falling or running into things we cannot see. It is that tiny light in a pool of darkness that lets us know we are going the right way.

Our Christian light is a guide for people of the world who we meet and who watch us. Some look at our lives as the standard that defines a Christian in their mind. If we are doing what we should, it is a positive guide. If we are not shining for Jesus, then they see a distorted or dim light. Jesus stated in the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matt 5:14-16 that, *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."* It can be a reminder to shine when people quote something that you have said or copy some of the same things you do. Children are well

known for copying what they see. People listen to what we say and watch us all the time, especially those of the world.

The world is a funny place when it comes to religious spiritual awareness. Just the other day, I was talking with a vendor who knows me and the person said a word that we would consider to be inappropriate for a Christian to say. Before I even reacted, the person immediately said, "Sorry, I should not have said that," and then rephrased the statement. I have never had any conversation with that person regarding such topics, but he knew. We make an impact on others around us whether it is good or bad. Is our light shining to the brightest it can be?

Besides light being a guide our pathway, light also has the ability to reveal problems. I can remember one time I was looking for a car and went shopping at night. There are a lot of lights in a car lot, so I was confident that shopping after dark would not be a problem. I found a car I liked, but when I went back the next day in the sunlight, I saw all sorts of blemishes and flaws in the car that I had missed the night before in the darkness. In the same way, our Christian light sometimes has the ability to force people to look at their own lives and they end up feeling disappointed with decisions they made. When we are around them, they often take those feelings out on us. Have you ever been treated differently by those in the world because you are a Christian? I have. They don't want us around because we make them feel guilty. What the world often fails to understand is they can have the same peace and happiness that we enjoy in Jesus

Christ if they would just change their ways. But, often, the worldly pleasures draw them away from the light and into the darkness of sin and despair. They love the world and the things in the world too much to change and turn toward Jesus.

The world does not realize that each of us was once in the darkness of sin. Paul said in Eph 5:8, "*...for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.*" We have accomplished what the rest of the world seems to think is impossible. We have turned from the world and we look to Jesus for our needs. Jesus said in Jn 8:12, "*I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.*" As we follow Jesus, we can and will keep our light strong and bright. What the world does not understand is our bright light is nothing more than the reflective light of Jesus. The further away from the light source, the dimmer our reflection will be. So, it is important for us to stay close to Jesus. The closer we are, the brighter our light and the more people we can shine our light upon.

There is an old story of a lighthouse keeper who was given oil once a month to keep the light bright so all the ships could avoid the dangers of the rocky shoreline. During one month, a woman asked the lighthouse keeper for some oil to warm her family. Another person requested oil for his lantern so he could see. A third one needed

(Continued on page 7)

some oil to lubricate a wheel. All of these requests seemed necessary for the lighthouse keeper so he granted them all. Toward the end of the month, he ran out of oil and the lighthouse light burned out. Several ships were wrecked and many lives lost. Upon investigation, the man was repentant, but was told that the oil was for only one purpose; to keep the light burning. This is how we sometimes handle conflicts in our day to day struggles with the world. So many times we are asked to compromise our Christian beliefs for a good reason. We tell ourselves that will be ok this one time. Then one time begins to be more times and before we know it, we have become part of the world by using our "oil" for other purposes instead of letting our light shine for Jesus. Our light burns out!

Let's not let the world's desires and pulls draw us away from the light of Jesus. As He said from the beginning, *"You are the light of the world..."* Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."



Matthew 5:21-32

You Have Heard...But I Say to You (Part I)

Aaron Lumpkin

The Sermon on the Mount has a theme of spiritual reawakening. *"Repent for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"* The leaders of the Jews had focused their attention on public displays of piety. Jesus wanted the lis-

teners, and wants us as well, to focus on spirituality. Be the salt of the earth, be the light of the world, be righteous without being a spectacle, and trust in God. Jesus says, *"I have not come to abolish them [the Law and the Prophets] but to fulfill them."* Mt 5:17 Then why does He seem to change the commands of parts of the Law of Moses in Matthew 5:21-48? In this article and Mark's to follow, we'll see that Jesus is not changing the Law at all, as it would seem at first glance, but is rather refocusing on the Spiritual side of the Law that had been basically ignored for centuries. And Jesus is describing the ideal heart of citizens in His coming kingdom.

In vs.21-26, Jesus compares anger with murder. No one would question that murdering your brother would be wrong, but it seemed to be okay to be angry with that same brother. Jesus uses hyperbole in His teaching to put such an attitude on par with murder. Obviously, being angry was not a violation of the Old or New Law. Paul quotes from Ps 4:4 saying, *"Be angry and do not sin."* (Eph 4:26) and we see Jesus Himself being angry as He threw the money changers out of the temple (Jn 2:13ff). But what our Lord seems to be saying is that when you're angry with your brother, if you deal with that attitude at that level it will never escalate to the point of murder. In other words, don't just focus on the law itself, but work to develop the proper attitude and you won't violate the actual command.

Jesus' next point deals with adultery, in vs. 27-30. *"You have heard it said, 'You shall*

(Continued on page 8)

not commit adultery' but I say everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Jesus is using hyperbole to emphasize the need to correct an attitude before it develops into sin. He isn't literally saying that lust is adultery any more than he's literally telling them to pluck out their right eye if it makes them stumble. The Law of Moses had some 613 commands and Jesus isn't adding another some 1500 years later. James clearly identifies that lust is a precursor to sin and not sin itself (Jas 1:14-16). Jesus is saying to stop the process before it ever gets to the point of sin by correcting the dangerous attitude.

Jesus then moves on to discuss divorce in vs 31-32. On the surface it might seem that Jesus is changing the law regarding divorce here, laying down a new rule to dissolve the marriage contract. But just as with the 2 previous passages, Jesus is addressing the motivation behind the specific law and not the law itself. It's important to understand that there was debate in Jesus' day regarding what exactly Moses meant in Deut 24 regarding when a man could divorce his wife (see Mt 19:3). One school of thought was that if he found almost any cause he could send his wife away, while some thought only if there was some sexual indecency could the marriage be terminated. Jesus' point is that marriage is permanent, and the husband or wife should not look for any excuse to end the marriage, as seemed to be happening with some degree of frequency.

What our Creator wants from man has never fundamentally changed. Whether one lived before the Mosaic Law or under it, or

are bound by 'the perfect law of liberty' as we now are, the Lord seeks those who would "serve Him with a whole heart," as David told Solomon in 1 Chr 28:9. If we work to develop this heart that Jesus teaches about in this sermon, we will find that we will not violate His commands. "Against such things there is no law," Paul says in Gal 5:23, speaking of such godly attitudes. If we are indeed citizens of His kingdom, we must constantly be working to develop and maintain this heart in all things, and certainly in our personal relationships as well.



Matthew 5:33-48

You Have Heard...But I Say to You (Part II)

Mark Gray

In Matthew 5:33, Jesus says, "You have heard... 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.'" He takes this command from Leviticus 19:12, "You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God," and from Numbers 30:2, "If a man vows a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth." But Jesus says, "But I say to you, 'Do not take an oath at all...'" Mt 5:34 What spiritual refocus could be achieved through making or not making a vow?

First of all Jesus wants us to always remember that God is holy. Today people sometimes use the phrase, "I swear to God"

(Continued on page 9)

when they want to make a point. It seems that this was the case in Jesus' time as well. This is dangerously close to using God's name in vain. Jesus does not want us to profane God's holiness by swearing on things associated with Him, so we should not swear *"by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King."* Mt 5:34-35 Can we then swear by ourselves? No. We do not have any sort of power over ourselves to *"make one hair white or black."* Mt 5:36 Then what can we swear by? Nothing.

Jesus simplifies the Law by commanding, *"Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No.'"* Mt 5:37 Anything else is unnecessary. This is the spirit of the original Law as well (perform what you have sworn). Jesus is telling His audience to be honest. Always be honest and oaths are not required. Do what you say you will do and there never needs to be any swearing.

Jesus says, *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'"* Mt 5:38 He takes this from Exodus 21:24 that talks about punishment for crimes of physical violence. The Jews of the time had become litigious and looking for something to sue about (sounds too much like our world today). Jesus tells the multitude that they *"should not resist...turn to him the other [cheek]."* Mt 5:39 What spirituality would be gained from this?

The Jews had lost sight of what the Law was meant to do, which was for protection of weaker people and deterrence from physical violence. Jesus wants us to avoid disputes and strife, do not give anyone a reason to want to slap you on the cheek. We should

seek to be peaceful with our neighbors just as Paul tells us in Romans chapter 12, specifically verse 18, *"live peaceably with all."* Jesus also wants us to be helpful. If someone would sue you for a *"tunic, let him have your cloak as well."* Mt 5:40 If you are forced to go one mile, go an extra one (vs 41). *"Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you."* (vs 42) No one should have to force us to lend a hand and help out, we should already be volunteering to help out those that need our help if we can.

Jesus finishes the section with, *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'"* Mt 5:43 He takes this from Leviticus 19:18, *"You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself."* This sounds focused on the spirit since it talks of love and not bearing a grudge, so why would Jesus refocus spirituality on *"lov[ing] your enemies and pray[ing] for those who persecute you?"* Mt 5:44

Jesus gives His own answer. *"For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"* Mt 5:46-47 The Jews had a relatively easy time loving their Jewish neighbors (other Jews) but had a hatred for Gentiles. Jesus says that loving those just like you is nothing special. Even the Gentiles love their own. He tells us we *"must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is*

(Continued on page 10)

perfect.” Mt 5:48 We have to love like God loves, and remember that *“God so loved the world that he gave His only Son”* for it. John 3:16 If God the Father would sacrifice Jesus to save the world, then the very least we can do is love our fellow man.

The Law of Moses was a physical law that gave strong hints of spirituality. Jesus took a few of those Laws and brought out the spiritual aspects. Our spirit is in the image of God, and we should strive to be like God. The Israelites were told this: *“Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.”* Lev 11:44 We are told by Jesus in John 4:24, *“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”* Let us take these scriptures and teachings from Christ and live spiritually.



Matthew 6:1-4; 16-18

Hypocritical Displays Of Righteousness

Phil Lumpkin

We’ve all known people who are pretentious. Maybe our parents warned us to be on our best behavior (or else) when special guests visited. We might have put forward our best face, but our heart wasn’t in it. We couldn’t wait to get back into our play clothes and back to just being ourselves when the guests left. That’s just a mild example of being something we’re not, but all of us have seen people whose full time job was to impress, to look good. In this section of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus specifi-

cally addresses hypocritical displays of righteousness. To this point in His sermon, Jesus has painted a sharp contrast between those who outwardly kept the Law and those with humble hearts, who were devoted to God. He now continues to draw this distinction by addressing the motives of the worshipper.

Matthew 6:1 reads, *“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.”* Jesus certainly didn’t mince words in this statement! If our righteousness is just for show, to please others, or to receive the praise of men, then God is not glorified, He is not pleased and He won’t reward us. Jesus gave three examples to illustrate His point. First, about giving alms; second, praying in public; and third, fasting. Praying will be addressed in the next article by Steven.

“When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.” Mt 6:2-4 Jesus says that ostentatious displays of piety to be seen of men is hypocritical. Sharing God’s blessings with the less fortunate is pleasing to the Lord. Paul & Barnabas were encouraged by James, Cephas and John *“to remember the poor.”* (Gal 2:10) Early Christians in Macedonia and Achaia gave us a wonderful exam-

(Continued on page 11)

ple of how this was to be done, especially to fellow saints. (Rom 15:26) In Galatians 6:10, Paul wrote, *“So then while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”* Jesus said not to make a spectacle of our sharing, even though our sharing may be observed by others. But we must never give — just to be seen of others. In Acts 5:36-37, scripture records that Barnabas sold a tract of land and gave the proceeds to the Apostles for the needy saints. In the next chapter, Ananias and Sapphira did the same thing, but their motive seems to have been to receive the praise of fellow saints and they paid a terrible price for their hypocrisy.

Jesus’ third example concerned fasting. *“And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.”* Mt 6:16-18 Fasting is generally associated with fervent prayer. David fasted and prayed for his infant son by Bathsheba, saying, *“Who knows, the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live.”* (2 Sam 12:15-23) David’s fasting and prayer was done in private. This mighty King could have made a public display of his grief or even commanded all of Israel to fast with him, but only his servants and immediate advisors were aware. God knew David’s contrite heart and showed him and Bathsheba mercy through the birth of Solomon.

Attitude of heart is important to the Lord. *“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”* Heb 4:12-13 As Jesus said, beware!



Matthew 6:5-15

The Lord’s Prayer

Steven D. Baxley

It is important to remember that the Sermon on the Mount encapsulates Jesus Christ’s core teachings, and that those teachings are very practical in nature. They serve to teach disciples not just how to think, but how to put that thinking into practice. This includes the section in the sermon in which Jesus deals with principles of prayer.

In this section, Jesus deals with two general items: attitudes in prayer, and then he provides the hearers with a model for prayer itself.

There are three elements of attitude that Jesus addresses. First, he addresses the attitude of hypocrisy that was prevalent among certain segments of Jewish society (vs. 5-6). These men would pray in the synagogues and other public places, desiring to be seen by others. The idea of praying to

(Continued on page 12)

God was not the most important for them. Rather, they wanted to increase their standing in society by being seen to be praying. Jesus' solution to this was to instruct those who were hearing the sermon to pray to God in secret, even in a room with a closed door. This is an example of Jesus' use of hyperbole. Certainly, it is appropriate to pray in other places than just behind a closed door. This is clear not only from Jesus' other examples (for example, in the garden before his arrest), but also from the practice of the apostles and early Christians. Jesus' point is that great care should be taken to make sure that prayer is offered to God, and not offered to enhance one's position in society.

Second, Jesus addresses the problem of prayers that are lengthy, and filled with empty phrases, that are so spoken with the intent that others will admire their many words (vs. 7-8). This was a particular problem among Gentiles, and is beautifully illustrated by the prophets of Baal arrayed against Elijah at Carmel (1 Kings 18:20-40). Notice verse 29: *"And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation..."* These pagan worshippers thought that if they called out long enough, their god would answer. Our God is not like that. As Jesus explains: *"Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."* (vs. 8) The issue is not the length of the prayers as such, but the purpose of the words being used. Christ's disciples need to remember that God does not hear the disciple because of his oratory skills, but because of the expression of his soul's desires.

Third, Jesus makes it clear that prayers can only be effective when the person doing

the praying is not guilty of the sin of not forgiving others (vs. 14-15). This principle is addressed after the model prayer that Jesus has just provided his disciples in verses 9-13. Verse 14 is introduced with the word "for," indicating that it follows upon what Jesus has just said. The model prayer includes a petition for forgiveness, and so it makes sense that this last principle should follow after its conclusion. Jesus makes it very clear to his disciples that those who are unwilling to extend forgiveness to others should not expect to receive any from God. This principle is taught in multiple places in the New Testament, particularly the memorable Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35).

When considering this section of the Sermon on the Mount, it is important to spend some time considering the Lord's Prayer itself. Among some religious groups, this prayer has become a ritualized prayer that is repeated at various times, particularly in worship services. This was not Jesus' intent in providing this model prayer. It is worth noting that the parallel model prayer recorded in Luke 11:2-4 is considerably shorter than the one recorded in Matthew 6. Although many of the key ideas are found in both, there are differences. This should lead us to understand that Jesus didn't intend for the prayer to be recited by rote.

However, there are elements which can be clearly seen in this model prayer, which should be elements of the prayers we offer, whether publically or privately:

Praise. The prayer begins with a statement of address to the Father, and

(Continued on page 13)

includes the words “hallowed be your name.” “Hallowed” simply means to count as holy. It is a statement acknowledging God’s holiness. It is reminiscent of the praise offered by the four living creatures in Revelation 4:8: “*Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.*” Christians should never forget exactly who they are addressing when offering prayer, nor should they forget to praise God in those prayers.

Supplication. The remainder of the prayer includes requests and petitions to God: 1) for his kingdom to come, 2) for his will to be done, 3) for daily food, 4) for forgiveness, 5) for deliverance from temptation and evil. These are not stated for God’s benefit, since he already knows what the petitioners need (vs. 8). Rather, Christians make these requests to God since he is the provider of all things, and they need to keep this always in mind.

This prayer is not exhaustive. Elsewhere in the New Testament, various other things are mentioned as being proper elements in our prayers, and yet they are nowhere mentioned *specifically* in the Lord’s Prayer. However, this model prayer sets out the basic structure and elements, and combined with the three principles given in the surrounding text serve as a basis upon which Christians should formulate their prayers to God.



Matthew 6:19-34

God’s Provision

Ron Gray

In this section of the Lord’s sermon, Jesus addresses a subject that many people, including some Christians, overlook. He speaks of our treasures, what we do with them, and even where we *store* them.

So often, we tend to think about the fact that “*God is a spirit...*” (John 4:24), therefore, he is concerned for our spiritual wellbeing and as far as physical things go, we are on our own. Jesus speaks about our physical needs and the concern that God has for us in that regard.

By the time his Sermon on the Mount took place, Jesus had lived on the earth for more than a quarter of a century. When I was much younger, I had wondered why Jesus did not descend from the clouds to begin His work, just as He had ascended in Acts chapter 1. Rather than going through a typical childhood, the trials of teenage years, and His twenties, why not just come here and powerfully complete the mission that His Father had given Him to accomplish? There is insight on this subject in Hebrews 4:15: He is able “*to sympathize with our weaknesses... who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*”

No one can seriously say to the Lord, “I cannot live the life that you have planned for me. It is just too hard! You don’t know what I’m going through.” He *does* know; he has been there. He faced the *same* temptations

(Continued on page 14)

that you face now, looked Satan in the eye and just said NO! Jesus at that time in his sermon on the mountain was (and still is) the most uniquely qualified person on the face of the earth to give advice on how to live our lives serving a perfect God in an imperfect world.

Jesus speaks of the “things” which we hold dear in our lives. He tells us that *reliance* upon money and the things that it can buy is an unwise path. Though we may see the riches of this world and long for “our share,” dreaming of the peace and security which that share could buy; he wisely says there is a better road to happiness, tranquility, and stability. He directs us to lay up *our* treasures in Heaven where the malicious hand of man cannot molest.

In verse 24 Jesus says, “*no one can serve two masters.*” A man can only truly love one master. He advises us to love God and not money. 1 Tim 6:6-10 is an excellent scripture to read at this point to help sort out the balance between our love for God and our need to deal with money to provide the necessities of life. The highlights of this passage are:

- Godliness with contentment is great gain.
- We brought nothing into this world and cannot take it with us.
- Having food and clothing, we should be content.
- Desiring riches causes us to fall into temptation, ruin, and destruction.
- “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.”

In light of the fact that we are to love

God and not to love money, turning our backs on acquiring wealth, then how are we to survive on this earth? Where do we get our food, clothing, and shelter? Jesus knew that these questions would arise and addresses them eloquently in verses 25-34. First, he says, don’t worry. But, as the saying goes, “that is easier said than done.” He goes on to explain by asking a philosophical question, “*Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?*” In essence he says, raise your head up from the mundane things and look at the big picture.

Jesus points to nature telling us to look at the birds that are by no means lazy, but do nothing to provide themselves with food, yet are well fed. They live lives without worry, faithfully knowing where their food comes from. “*...your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?*”

At times we look in our closets; seeing the same old clothes that we have “worn a thousand times,” lamenting “I have nothing to wear.” Jesus directs our eyes to the fields to see how God clothes them in the colors of spring and the colors of summer. This really appeals to me. As I look across the fields at my home and the homes of my children, I see the beauty that Jesus describes. Every year, acres of yellow and purple flowers of spring sway in the gentle breezes and look up to their Lord as the raindrops from the heavens refresh them. The red and white flowers of summer lift their faces to our God as He bathes them in golden sunlight.

Jesus tells us, “*But if God so clothes the grass of the field... will he not much more*

(Continued on page 15)

clothe you, O you of little faith?" (Verse 30)

The Lord sums up this section with words of comfort, love, and wisdom. He tells us not to worry about food, drink, or clothing. Sinners worry about such, not children of God, because *"your Heavenly Father knows..."* When we are tempted to worry, we should remember that beautiful phrase, *"your Heavenly Father knows..."*

Jesus told the people there, tells us today, and declares to a thousand generations to come (if the world continues), *"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you."* (Verse 33) There is a great comfort and stability, in unstable times, to be found in the kingdom of God.

Lastly, Jesus says don't worry about tomorrow, deal with the problems of "today" and let tomorrow worry about itself. I used to be a "worrier." I worried about everything! If I had nothing to worry about, I worried that I must have forgotten something! Worry is common to *all* of us. How we handle worry is what sets us apart. Jesus tells us here at the end of chapter 6, just how to handle worry. Basically he says it is enough to take one day at a time.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philipians 4:6-7



Matthew 7:1-12

Judging Others

Carol Fertig

I dare say everyone reading this remembers with a measure of shame a time when he or she judged a brother or sister too hastily, perhaps on the basis of faulty, insufficient information. Judgments are made

daily on insignificant matters which have no eternal consequences, but some judging is very serious and must be undertaken with proper preparation. Of course, the final, ultimate judge is God Himself through Jesus

Christ, but in Jesus' discourse from the mountainside, He makes it clear that we are responsible for exercising a certain amount of judgment in this life, and He is concerned with how we will accomplish that task. He tells us: *"Judge not, that you be not judged.*

For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you." Mt 7:1-2 What a fitting beginning for this section of His discourse which will end with what is called the "Golden Rule" given in Matthew 7:12! Jesus doesn't mean that we are not to judge at all, just that we judge in a way that is kind and profitable. Before He states: *"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets,"* Jesus teaches three lessons about our relationships with each other and how they relate to our relationship with God: judging each other, protecting what is holy, and asking for what is needed (prayer).

We will never be as pure and as righteous as our ultimate judge is. We can, how-

ever, examine ourselves and see if we are guilty of doing what we are judging our brother for doing. This is looking for the log, quite a blindingly large impediment, in our own eye before examining the speck, perhaps just a small, irritating splinter, which is in the eye of another person. We're told by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:28 that a person should examine himself before eating of the Lord's Supper to see that we are taking it in a proper manner. Later in 2 Corinthians 13:5 we are told to examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith, to test ourselves. Jesus had taught earlier in this same sermon that a person who is having a problem with a brother should not expect to worship effectively until reconciliation with that brother has been successfully achieved. Hypocritical attitudes and actions must be honestly searched out and eradicated before righteous judgment can be made. The principle is that in order to stand before God and offer service to Him, all possible effort must have been made to have a good conscience and pure motives.

The book of James gives the Christian practical advice about how to be sure he is acting according to God's wishes. We can effectively examine ourselves by looking into the perfect law, the law of liberty and by doing what we find there (James 1:21-25). By doing this we might identify pockets of hypocrisy in our judging. It would be well to pray, as David did in Psalm 51:10, *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."* With His word as a measuring stick and a prayer answered for a clean heart, we have a proper foundation for judgment. Our motivation for judging should be

open to scrutiny, also. If we are focused on the restoration of a brother who is not doing what he/she should be, we will be able to judge as the scripture teaches us to judge. We cannot judge hearts as God does, but we can lovingly and carefully examine the actions of ourselves and others.

There is a situation in which it is not good to pass judgment, as Paul warns the Romans in Romans 14. His point in the discussion is that some things are between God and the individual: *"Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand."* Rom 14:4 The problems were arising because some were able to eat meat with a clear conscience and keep certain days without offence, but their brothers were judging them because of this. Paul says in Romans 14:10, 13 *"Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God . . . Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother."* Harsh judgment or inappropriate judgment can actually cause a brother to stumble. It's important that whatever we do, we build up rather than tear down. Later in His ministry Jesus stated *"Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."* John 7:24 The second chapter of the book of James is a wonderful lesson against superficial judging which ends with a restatement of the "royal law." (James 2:1-9)

(Continued on page 17)

The next point in the discussion is included in a sort of stand-alone statement that is somewhat easy to gloss over: *“Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.”* Mt 4:6 In light of what Jesus has just said, when we have discovered through examination and study the things that are pleasing to God, we must consider those things as valuable and not profane them. When we are sure that there is no further ground to be gained from continuing to try to bring someone to God, it is time to withdraw and not open His Word and His people to scorn and ridicule. As Jesus sent His apostles out to proclaim that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, He told them, *“And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, ‘it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.”* Mt 10:14-15 Paul and Barnabas did just that when the Jews stirred up persecution against them and drove them away from Antioch in Pisidia: *“But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium.”* Acts 13:51 Symbolically, those who will not receive what the Christian would share with them are left to deal with their own dirt, and the giver is left unsullied.

The final thought in this passage, Matthew 7:7-11, is that God will give us what we need to perform any task that He has set for us, i.e., judging others and respecting the holy things of God. Jesus bases our asking (prayer) for gifts from our Heavenly Father on an asking process with which all are famil-

iar: that of father and child. Earthly fathers are anxious to give their children the very best gifts they can manage, and they can't love in nearly the unconditional and perfect way that God does. Since that is the case, when we ask of God, seek God, knock on God's door, we will be given the good things of God. (Matthew 7:11) James says in James 1:17 *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”* Solomon knew that the very best gift of all was wisdom, the ability to judge righteously. James 3:17 says, *“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”* It's wonderful to pray with the expectation taught in these verses! (Matthew 7:7-11)

Completing the ideas in this section of the lesson is what we call the Golden Rule. It is the loving and caring way we should carry out God's wishes in regard to our relationships with each other: *“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”* Mt 7:12 All-encompassing, this simple precept will enable us to fulfill God's plan for us in regard to each other and to Himself.



**Blessed is the nation
whose God is the LORD
Psalm 33:12a**

Matthew 7:13-23
Known By Your Fruit
Trey Haskett

The old adage “Don’t judge a book by its cover” comes to mind immediately when considering the passage Matthew 7:13-23. Therein contained is a charge to enter by the narrow gate, a warning about false teachers, and a reminder that not all who claim citizenship in heaven have actually attained such. The thread that ties these things together is that they all have to do with entrance into the kingdom of heaven. The first and the last can be explicitly understood as relating to the entrance into the kingdom of heaven. The middle however takes a little bit more forethought as to how it relates to the other two. Its relation can be better understood by first examining our modern day “fruit-tree” adage aforementioned.

A book entitled “Touchdown” with a picture of a football lying in the end zone of a football field might give one the impression that the book is about a football game, but upon perusing the pages they find that it is not a book about a football game, and in fact a football is not even mentioned in the book. By the time they have voyaged from one cover to the other they realize that the book is actually a three-step guide to reaching down and touching your toes. It’s an absurd example, but the Bible deals in exaggerations and absurdities as well. For instance, take the wolf in sheep’s clothing that this example is analogous of. The point is that the outside doesn’t always give the whole picture, and in fact it could convey a very different picture than what is actually being described.

You have to look deeper to clearly see the picture being painted. That is why judging a book solely by its cover is a foolish decision because as Jesus is suggesting here in Matthew 7, looks can be deceiving. Having established that, hopefully our text will become easier to understand.

The charge to enter the narrow gate is followed by a description of an alternate gate. These two gates are juxtaposed in a way that makes each an exclusive and very different type of entrance into two very different places. There is the wide gate, which leads to destruction. The path to this gate is easy and many enter in. And there is the narrow gate, the way to which is hard and few will find it, but this way leads to life. The charge then is to enter the gate that leads to life. The choice as to which gate to strive to enter is simple, life over destruction, but the text tells us that the pursuit of such gate is not as simple as our decision to do so. This is far easier said than done because there are wolves dressed in sheep’s clothing that are trying to lead us astray.

These false prophets or false messengers deceptively claim to be from God and would leave others to believe that the message they bring is truth. This sadly is just not the case and many fall victim to their lies. What makes it all the more dangerous is that on the surface it is hard to see these wolves as such. This is because they do not appear to us often times as wolves, but rather as harmless well-meaning sheep that are trying to communicate the will of God. How thorny an adversary is the false prophet that he cannot

(Continued on page 19)

easily be seen for what he is? So then we must examine the fruits of any teacher or anyone claiming to deliver God's message to know whether what he says is actually coming from God. In this case the fruit or what is being produced from the "prophet" is his message. We must be willing and able to take the message given by the prophet and look at it next to the Word of God, which is the standard. When we do so honestly it will be clear whether or not this messenger is bearing good fruit or not. If what he says fails to measure up to the standard then we know that he is a false teacher. However, we will only be able to separate the good from the bad if we know the standard. Therefore, we must be like the Bereans of Acts 17 who searched the scriptures daily that they might discern the things that come from God.

In the final section, the entrance into the kingdom of heaven is mentioned again, this time bringing with it the piercing truth that there are even those who claim to be on the path to the narrow gate and thus claim citizenship in heaven, who will not enter in. On the surface it may seem as if there is a strong level of subjectivity on which one's entrance into the kingdom of heaven heavily lies, because we have here these people who **appear** to be doers of the God's will. Appearance as we have previously mentioned is not everything and it is clear from Jesus' words that these people are not those interested in doing God's will. Though they say "Lord, Lord" and prophesy and cast out demons and do mighty works in the name of the Christ's name, the insinuation is that they are only outwardly doing God's will. Such superficiality will not grant one en-

trance into the kingdom of heaven. This false pretense is like that of the Pharisees who were harshly chided by Jesus for being as whitewashed tombs full of rotting bones (Matt. 23:27). The Pharisees claimed to uphold the law and they acted as the standard for the Jewish people in Jesus' time and yet they did so partially and half-heartedly. Jesus instructs His disciples that they will never enter the kingdom of heaven unless their righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees. If entrance into the kingdom of heaven and walking through the gate which leads to life is truly our goal, we will be focused on doing God's will; not so others will see or so that we will give off a certain appearance, but for the reason that we want to please our Father in heaven. Though not explicitly stated here we must remember entrance into the kingdom of heaven is reserved for those who bear the fruits that God desires (Matt. 21:43) and are actively seeking to do His will.



Matthew 7:24-29

Building on a Firm Foundation

Ephriam Davis

Those of us who have had the privilege to be in an area with access to an ocean front beach, have perhaps had the experience of walking barefoot along the water's edge and leaving our foot prints in the soft mushy sand. If you stopped and turned around for a moment, and stood in that spot

(Continued on page 20)

to look at the foot prints, how long would it be, before you would see those prints disappear? _____ Furthermore, as you attempt to remain standing still and balanced in that same spot, how long would it be before you really struggled to do so? _____ Perhaps, in contrast, a very short distance up the coast, you see some people standing still on some very large rocks protruding a couple of linear feet out of the ground. The same advancing and receding ocean waves that just erased all of your foot prints from the sand, are also vigorously pulling back and forth around your ankles while literally sweeping the sand from under your feet that you literally can not stand still in your original spot.

Jesus used a variety of teaching styles, and one of them included the natural forces in our physical environment that were clearly understood to explain and illustrate spiritual truths. This method is very effective. "The Parable of The Two Builders" as provided in Mat 7:24-27 is a clear example of that style. A wise contractor, knowledgeable of the importance needing a firm, solid foundation upon which to construct a building, because of potential perils of wind, rain, and flood, will seek to set that foundation on a rock. Otherwise, he will not even attempt to build the structure. The account of this parable found in Luke 6:47-49 brings out an additional point in that the man "**dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock.**" The phrase "dug deep" strongly suggests that a significant extra effort was made first to dig past some soft mushy sandy soil to find the solid rock.

The parable is self-explanatory. It needs little commentary. The best commentary for it

is actually found in scripture. The rock is Christ, (1 Cor 10:1-4). Christ is the Word, (John 1:1, 14). Christ built His church, on this rock, which is the Word, (Mat 16:16, 18-19). It is so simple and straight forward, it effectively forms the lyrics to one of our more popular children's bible class songs. So why is it that 3 year olds immediately grasp its fundamental lesson, but so many adults miss it? _____

11 This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' 12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:11-12 NKJV)

Matthew closes the entire Sermon on the Mount with a couple of very significant observations. First, the people were astonished. A few interesting synonyms for the word astonished which help with its meaning are: overwhelmed, dumb-founded, dazed, & amazed. We could almost imagine, these folks were left standing there speechless with their mouths and eyes wide open. Second, and more importantly, the reason for the previous, He taught as one having authority, because He actually had authority. (Mat 28:18, John 12:47-49)

28 And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, 29 for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. (Mat 7:28-19 NKJV)

