

“Matthew”

Fall Series 1

Lesson 6

“Matthew 5:1-26”

Objective: To understand the message that Matthew meant to convey to his audience and then to come to understand what that message means for us today as those living in the 21st century. We will seek to ascertain what this message means and to determine how we are intended to live our lives as those who are disciples of Christ in our modern context, in light of the message it contains. We will place special emphasis upon application.

Materials: I will begin by examining carefully the Greek text of Matthew, examine other early translations such as the Syriac Peshitta, various modern translations, and any other sources relevant to the historical setting of the first century Roman world that can help us to understand the original meaning. I will then examine early interpretations and understandings and examine commentaries and modern interpretations to enlighten our understanding, help us make application to our current situation.


Procedures

1. We will begin by examining the text from the Greek text.
2. We will examine the contextual setting and seek to understand as much as we possibly can about the historical, cultural, and social settings, in order to understand the message Matthew intended and that God still intends for us.
3. From here, we will seek to find out how to best apply the words of Matthew, for the early disciples, then to our modern contextual framework as disciples of Jesus.
4. We will seek to understand the attitudes that we are called to have as disciples and to reflect not only the actions that are the calling of a disciple, but also to learn how to form our attitudes and thoughts in order to reflect our calling as followers of Jesus Christ.

Lesson

Chapter 5 of Matthew brings us to one of the most sacred, inspiring, and holy, parts of Scripture. We come to the *Sermon on the Mount*. I visited the site where it is said that Jesus gave this message in 2016, and took the picture below. I went with Brooks Loveless, and Evertt Huffard from Memphis. We read from Matthew's account of this sermon and it was as if we could hear the echo of Jesus' voice there in that place and also we could still feel the impact of these words as if the spirit of Jesus still lingers in that place and touches the hearts of those that visit and are open to hear His words. Of course, today the Church of the





Beatitudes sits on this site and is both beautiful and serene.

However, I still prefer the view overlooking the Sea of Galilee.

In that scene, I felt and still feel powerfully the presence of our Lord. His words still seem to echo in that place and His Spirit lingers there still, touching those who come to find Him, to understand Him better, those who seek His presence. It may seem silly some, but that day still lifts my soul and challenges me to hear His voice and now those words do not just echo just in that place, but I carry the echo of those words in my heart as if a part of that moment, that day, calls to me still. I suspect that the shrubs and bushes were not on this mount when Jesus went there, but they grow well here as if the touch of the author of life has reinvigorated this place to make it a garden where people can walk with God in the cool of the day.¹ God still calls out to His children who try to hide from Him their shame and their fear. And yet, God still seeks to walk with us, to share in fellowship with us and to cover our shame. Jesus, at the beginning of His ministry walks in the midst of the crowds of people and begins feeding

¹ Genesis 3:8 **During that day's cool evening breeze, they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden; and the man and his wife hid themselves from the LORD God in the middle of the garden's trees.** ⁹ The LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" CEB.

them real food, the words of God. He “taught” (ἐδίδασκεν - *edidasken*) them.

The discourse of Jesus begins by laying out the manifesto of the values of the kingdom of heaven. The words of Jesus are carefully crafted so as to make them easy to memorize. Most of the statements that Jesus makes stand out as polar opposites to the values of this world. Conventional societal values are dismissed: As the world would dismiss as losers, the people that are described as winners in the Kingdom of God, the tables of values are turned. These people would be dismissed as wimps and losers by society and the world.² Now they are declared as those who are favored by God and valued in the Kingdom of Heaven. There is a huge paradox set out by Jesus that seeks to challenge the very fabric of human values and human interactions with one another, and with their God. His statements counter much of the fabric that human civilization is founded upon. It reverses those values and aligns them, for the followers of Christ, with the values and with the heart of God.

² R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, in The New International Commentary on the New Testament series (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), p. 159.

At 5:2, Jesus will state that “Blessed” (**Μακάριοι - makarioi**) are those that are “poor” (**πτωχοὶ - ptochoi**) in spirit. Beatitudes, statements of those who are “blessed” or “happy,” ... occur in both pagan and Judeo-Christian literature. The first extant instance of this type of literature is found in the work of Pindar³ (b. 522 or 518 B.C.). The word **Μακάριοι - makarioi** basically carries the meaning of to be “free from daily cares and worries, to be prosperous.” This was a word used of the blessed state of the gods who neither toiled nor suffered (cf. Homer, *Odyssey* 5:7; Socrates, *Ep.* 6:4).⁴ The words of Jesus, in the beatitudes, surpass all the words used in such literature that have gone before. They are more widely known, they have greater transformative effect on the world, and if we will allow it, they cut to the very heart of our soul and still transform us from the inside out even today.

At 5:3, Jesus begins His list of those who are “blessed,” those who are relieved of cares, concerns, and they are reassured that they are “blessed” because they are participants, citizens, of the

³ cf. Pindar, *Pythian Odes*, 5.45. “Blessed are you in having, though after great toil, a memorial of finest words of praise, for among forty 50 charioteers who fell, you preserved your chariot intact with your unflinching mind, and now you have come to the plain of Libya from the splendid games and to your native city.” https://www.loebclassics.com/view/pindar-pythian_odes/1997/pb_LCL056.313.xml?result=5&rskey=5VASEe

⁴ W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, International Critical Commentary series, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), pp. 431-434.

“kingdom of heaven.” What does it mean to be “poor in Spirit?”

The first thing to note is that Jesus overturns a popular secular sentiment that basically states that “blessed are the rich.”⁵ Jesus uses the word poor to make a direct attack on this idea; the idea that the “rich” are blessed.⁶ The opposite of “rich” is “poor.” There is a connection being made here in some sense, but Jesus has more to say than just a statement about economics. He says “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” A “poor” person is one that is needy. And there is a connection made here by Matthew with Isaiah 61:1-2.⁷ In this passage of Scripture the oppressed people of God are promised salvation.⁸

These people not only face material poverty, they are also people that are reflected in the Bible as God’s faithful people, humbly dependent upon His protection in the face of oppression, which they endure from the ungodly rich.⁹ For understanding of

⁵ cf. James 2:5 **My dear brothers and sisters, listen! Hasn’t God chosen those who are poor by worldly standards to be rich in terms of faith? Hasn’t God chosen the poor as heirs of the kingdom he has promised to those who love him?** CEB.

⁶ W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, p. 442.

⁷ **The LORD God’s spirit is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim release for captives, and liberation for prisoners, 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and a day of vindication for our God,....** CEB.

⁸ W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, p. 443.

⁹ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 165.

who the “poor in spirit” are we should be reminded of Isaiah 66:2.¹⁰ This verse conveys the idea that God will focus on those “who tremble at” His word. These are people who know that they need God and who rely upon Him for their protection, their hope, and for their salvation.¹¹ These are not people that rely upon their own inner strength, their own resourcefulness, their own “spirit,” to somehow, defiantly, overcome the difficult circumstances of their life.

These are people that rely upon God and seek His help. They are desperate and utterly without hope, apart from their hope in God. In a sense, the only lifeline that is possible for them is from God. Jesus says, that to those such as these belongs the “kingdom of heaven.” Jesus states that the standards of the world are wrong and that the measure of success and happiness that the world uses are wrong. At the beginning of His ministry Jesus challenges those standards, those understandings, the world system, at its very core. Needless to say, He has set Himself on a collision course with the powers of this world, both human, and

¹⁰ **My hand made all these things and brought them into being, says the LORD. But here is where I will look: to the humble and contrite in spirit, who tremble at my word.** CEB.


¹¹ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 165.

spiritual. His ministry will stand in opposition to all those forces which would stand arrayed against the rule and authority of God. He sets out His agenda, His manifesto, from the beginning.

At 5:4, Jesus will speak to those who mourn (**πενθοῦντες - *penthountes***). Have you ever mourned the loss of a loved one? The pain of that loss pierces right through your very being and you can feel the deep and piercing pain that cannot be quenched. In mourning, there is a sense of loss, a sense of sadness, a touch of anger at the injustice, and more, all rolled up gnawing away at your insides as if you had swallowed molten lead. It consumes from the inside. Here Jesus is not indicating that such people will be “happy,” but that they will be “comforted” (**παρακληθήσονται - *paraklethsontai***).¹² The flaming hot, biting pain of mourning will be quenched through the comfort of God’s own Spirit. God’s presence brings the comfort and fulfills the need of our soul.

At 5:5, Jesus once again counters the standards of this world. In his great epic poem the *Aeneid*, Virgil, sets out the case for why Rome should rule the world and it was certainly not because they were meek, and humble (**πραεῖς - *praeis***), but

¹² cf. John 14:16 **And I will petition the Father and another comforter (**πράκλητον - *parakleton***) He will give to you in order that He might be with you into the eternity.**



because they were bold, brash, and chosen by the gods. Here Jesus speaks regarding, those who are “...not only disadvantaged and powerless, but also of those whose attitude is not arrogant and oppressive. The term in itself may properly be understood of their relations with other people; they are those who do not throw their weight about.¹³ At Psalm 37:11, we find, “But the meek will inherit the earth, and delight themselves in abundant peace.” The words of Jesus are infused with Scripture from start to finish and He continually sets these words out before His audience. In so doing, He transforms their perception of the reality of existence.

At 5:6, Jesus will turn to those that hunger and thirst for righteousness. Most people have a sense of what they consider to be just and right and most will pursue their vision of justice, or righteousness relentlessly. However, it is so often the case that when the tables are reversed in an unjust situation, and the former victims now stand in the position of power and authority, the victims then become the perpetrators of injustice. Human beings are not very good at administering justice. Part of the problem in this is that we do not have the full range of information

¹³ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 166.

in order to fully evaluate what justice actually consists of in any given situation. Another part of the problem is that we often feel like we are victims as recipients of injustice, and in this state of mind we believe that those who perpetrate injustice should be punished. The challenge in this moment is how to insure that the punishment is proportional to the injustice. That is an extremely complex problem and requires more insight, wisdom, and comprehension of justice than is possible for human beings. The promise of Jesus here is the promise of divine intervention, divine justice.


The deliverance from “injustice” that is promised here goes far beyond our concepts of justice. The Greek word *δικαιοσύνη* - *dikaio sunē* is the term that is used in the Old Greek translation of Hebrew Scriptures (The Septuagint) to translate the Hebrew word *צְדָקָה* - *tsedakah*. This word does often mean “righteousness,” or “justice,” but it can also carry the idea of “deliverance,” or “salvation.” The words of Jesus here speak of far more than merely a just world. They speak of a safe kingdom where there need not be any sense of fear or trepidation regarding the way a person will be treated. This is promised because God will feed

them until they are filled and God will stand as the arbiter of justice. It is perhaps the case that most of us today do not fear hunger and have never really experienced the pangs of genuine hunger. Such was not the case in the ancient world. Famines were a common occurrence and the poor fought for survival and something to eat for much of their lives. Survival was a real struggle for many. They hungered even more for justice and what was right often bearing the brunt of an unjust society and those who had the power to get their way. These will have their fill of the righteousness that comes from God.

At 5:7, we come to one of many places that highlight God's requirement of reciprocity.¹⁴ There is a conditional nature to what Jesus says here that will also be highlighted in parables of Jesus.¹⁵ Mercy is closely linked with forgiveness from the one who hopes to receive mercy from God. There are times, when our sense of justice focuses upon justice for ourselves without considering the consequences for others. This runs counter to the nature of God

¹⁴ cf. 9:13 - **Go and learn what this means: I want mercy and not sacrifice. I didn't come to call righteous people, but sinners.**"; 12:7 - **If you had known what this means, I want mercy and not sacrifice, you wouldn't have condemned the innocent.**; 23:23 - **"How terrible it will be for you legal experts and Pharisees! Hypocrites! You give to God a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, but you forget about the more important matters of the Law: justice, peace, and faith. You ought to give a tenth but without forgetting about those more important matters.** CEB .

¹⁵ Matthew 18:21-35.



and to the ministry of Jesus. He challenges us to focus upon others. I wonder why we are so often afraid that we will be too merciful to others, allow them too much grace? Perhaps we are afraid that they will take advantage of us? I wonder if we ever think about the fact that we often take the mercy and grace of God for granted. In this verse, Jesus challenges us to consider others and to recognize that to fail to do so endangers our own selves. The idea is for such thinking to transform our hearts so that our hearts will more fully reflect the nature of God who bestows upon us such boundless mercy each and every day.

At 5:8, Jesus once again focuses upon the heart and soul of His audience. This time the focus is upon those that have “pure hearts.” What does it mean to have a “pure heart?” It means that those who are described in this way are clean before God. They are acceptable to God, good in the eyes of God, or good as God thinks. The focus is upon pleasing God and not the self. Such people are free of impurity in the sight of God. This is such a different perspective from the one found in the world of today, or the ancient world. There is no sense of manipulation, focus on the self, no hidden agendas, and no corruption or impurity. People

such as this will see God. This is something that not even Moses was allowed to do. Jesus here promises this great privilege and honor to those who listen to His words.

At 5:9, Jesus challenges His audience to be “peacemakers” (*εἰρηνοποιοί* - *eirenopoioi*). This is one who makes peace and seeks peace in the way they act and in the way they interact with others: Not as in the case of the Colt Peacemaker, but as genuine arbiters of peace. Jesus would demonstrate a new way to arbitrate peace through His ministry and His life. Rather than through force and power as was the way of Rome and the other kingdoms of the world He would initiate peace through, love, compassion, and forgiveness. People such as this will be called literally “sons” (children) of God. What a huge blessing to be called children of God.

At 5:10, Jesus will move onto those who are blessed because of the fact that they are willing to stand up for what is right. When you stand up for what is right you will often find that you become a threat to others who have a different agenda, a different set of priorities. Sometimes those priorities are money, power, authority, or what benefits them, or their group or tribe. Making

space for others is the way of God and true righteousness is not threatened, or intimidated by other's priorities of self-interest. At 5:11 Jesus will connect this to the way those walking as disciples of Jesus can expect to be treated because of Him. Blessed are those that wear the name of Jesus in the truth of their life, in the way they walk through each of their days. I wonder if people will know that I am a Christian because of the way I act and talk ,and not because of a label that I wear or a bumper sticker that I have on my car?

At 5:12, there is a change in expression, but Jesus continues to put forth His manifesto of change, highlighting the difference between Kingdom values and earthly values and ways. Basically, in this verse, Jesus will use two words that could both mean to "rejoice" (*χαίρετε - chairete* and *ἀγαλλιᾶσθε - agalliaithe*). Both of these words are given as imperatives, commands by Jesus, He orders those who would hear His words to do these things. Disciples of Christ are challenged to be purveyors of joy and rejoicing in their demeanor and in their lives. They are to be glad not just for the sake of being glad, but particularly when they are persecuted, pursued by those that oppose Jesus and His kingdom.


The blessing is not in the suffering itself, but in the promised outcome of the suffering.¹⁶ Avoiding the suffering also equates to avoiding the blessing.

At 5:13, the call to accept persecution with joy is now followed in verses 13-16 by a series of images which explain why it is of crucial importance that disciples should both be different, and be seen as different.¹⁷ It should be the case that for those being called to be disciples, discipline is what is a way of life. Not just any form of discipline, but the discipline that Jesus is setting out here and would continue to set out throughout His lifetime of ministry. Here, the reference is to salt, straightforward, and simple one would think, but the number of interpretations that I have heard regarding what this saying of Jesus means is mind-boggling. Sirach 39:26 lists salt as one of the essentials necessary for human life.¹⁸ There was the understanding in the ancient world that salt was essential for the well-being of human life and

¹⁶ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 172.

¹⁷ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 173.

¹⁸ **Basic to all the necessities of human life are water, fire, iron, salt, fine flour, milk, honey, wine, oil, and clothing.** CEB.




so also are the disciples of Jesus essential for the well-being of the earth.¹⁹

Unsalty salt is a contradiction of terms, but it must be understood that salt in the ancient world was seldom pure sodium chloride. It was harvested from natural sources such as from the Dead Sea and it is conceivable that all of the sodium chloride could be washed out, leaving behind only other minerals, in the refining processing rendering the salt useless for its intended purpose. In any case it is not Jesus' purpose to teach chemistry. Disciples are to flavor the world with the wisdom that comes from their different perspective of the world and what is desirable and needed. Their wisdom comes about through their following of Jesus and His teachings; they the world a better place, one seasoned with saltiness.²⁰

5:14 sets a similar tone, though using different images. Anyone who has stumbled around in the dark should understand the need for light and the great service that it does for the world. Again Jesus is not interested in teaching the scientific importance of light, but is interested in teaching its practical importance to life

¹⁹ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 173.


²⁰ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 174.



in the Kingdom of God and for its inhabitants. It is certainly the case that the presence of this light will also benefit the rest of society as well. 5:15-16 indicate that the focus must be this way because of the fact that light such as this will mean that God will be praised. He is, after all, the source of all life, light, and all that is good in this world and in the next.

To say that 5:17 has generated controversy is to make an astronomical understatement. The focus here is upon how the disciples are to fulfill the will of God. Each verse in this next section does in fact make a rather different point. Some have taken these verses to indicate that Matthew takes a very conservative view of keeping the Law.²¹ There is still today considerable confusion and debate as to whether Christians are to keep the Law. Some say yes, while others say no. To be sure there is a lot more to the discussions and to the answers than can be answered simply by “yes,” or “no.” Almost no one that I am aware of expects Christians to keep all of the law, such as the laws of levitical marriage, the sacrifice of animals and such. In fact, most

²¹ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, pp. 177-179.



modern Jews do not observe these aspects of the Law either.

There are in fact no purists keeping all or keeping none of the Law.

If one takes verses 18 and 19 of this chapter on their own one could easily get the impression that Jesus is here advocating the very strict and a very traditional observance of the Law. If that is in case the fact is then that such a Jesus, as portrayed here by Matthew, would be out of step with the overall thrust of the New Testament and with the almost universal consensus of Christians ever since the first century.²² Certainly, it is the case that there have been and are exceptions, to this perspective within Christian circles, in that some think that the Law should be strictly observed by the followers of Christ such as was taught by the ancient Ebonites. There are groups today that believe that observance of parts of the Law are indeed indicated as still in force such as the observance of the ten commandments. However, even in this, most groups would modify the keeping of Sabbath to a Sunday observance rather than a Saturday observance and even among the Seventh Day Adventist who do observe a Saturday sabbath observance, there was an element of contention regarding this


²² R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 179.

until the 1855 conference that settled the Sabbath as beginning on sunset Friday and ending at sunset on Saturday. This was about 10 years after the start of this movement and meant that before this time this was not a settled matter.²³

The question of keeping all, or part of, the Law still rests hard on the hearts and minds of many today. Do we have to observe the Law today, do we have to observe the ten commandments today? If so, on what basis, and some would even ask what percentage of observance is proper? In every encounter that Jesus would have with Pharisees and lawyers of Israel He would continually applied a stricter interpretation to the questions of keeping the Law. For Jesus, it was not sufficient to keep the letter of the Law, but rather the intent. People were not just called to avoid committing adultery by Jesus, but to avoid the lust behind the act.²⁴ What was the intent of the Law? Was it meant to effect actions only, or was it meant to transform the heart, the very being, of the person? This means that a person is called to keep more than just the letter of the Law, they are called

²³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabbath_in_seventh-day_churches#:~:text=116\).,to%20starting%20at%20sunset%20Friday](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabbath_in_seventh-day_churches#:~:text=116).,to%20starting%20at%20sunset%20Friday).

²⁴ Matthew 5:27-28 - **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”** NRSV.



to keep the intent, to be like God, pure in heart and motivation, not just in actions, or as a ritual act.

At 5:18 Jesus will address this matter calling for the reality to come. It is only through the transformative power of the grace of God exercised through the working of the Holy Spirit that anyone would ever have a hope of becoming the kind of person that God called His people to be in the Law. We, as disciples of Jesus Christ, are called to fulfill the Law in the fullness of its intent. Does that mean it is okay to break the Law? God forbid that we would even consider doing so. We are to fulfill far more than just the actions of the Law and instead to fulfill its full intent, which we see lived out perfectly in the life of Jesus. How do we keep the Sabbath? Do we simply honor God and contemplate God on a single day, or could we possibly do this in powerful and God-honoring ways each and every day?

What about the sacrificial laws? The Letter to the Hebrews is clear that those sacrifices have no further place after the one perfect sacrifice has been offered by Jesus. The writings of Paul, and his attitude to the Law, provide for a rich variety of interpretations, which can be attested by many doctoral

dissertations. Paul uses language about freedom from the Law.²⁵

All of these verses sit very uncomfortably with the view that Torah observance remains unchanged since the coming of the Messiah.

With regard to the food laws, the New Testament makes it

apparent that these Laws are not binding upon all Christians.²⁶ At

15:11²⁷ Jesus will make a pronouncement that in effect undercuts

the entire foundation of understanding for the Levitical laws of

purity. In the verses that will immediately follow this section we

will find Jesus taking issue in various ways with the literal

observance of the law as mere regulations. He challenges the

understanding of these ordinances in a number of ways, some

quite nuanced and focusing upon intent rather than upon the

literal meaning.²⁸

²⁵ Galatians 5:1-6 - **It is for freedom that Christ set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and refuse to submit again to the yoke of slavery. 2 Mark my words: I, Paul, say to you that if you get yourself circumcised Christ will benefit you no more. 3 I impress on you once again that every man who accepts circumcision is under obligation to keep the entire law. 4 When you seek to be justified by way of law, you are cut off from Christ: you have put yourselves outside God's grace. 5 For it is by the Spirit and through faith that we hope to attain that righteousness which we eagerly await. 6 If we are in union with Christ Jesus, circumcision makes no difference at all, nor does the lack of it; the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.** REB. cf. Romans 7:1-6; 10:4; Galatians 2:19; 3:24-25

²⁶ Acts 11:2-10; Romans 14:14.

²⁷ **No one is defiled by what goes into his mouth; only by what comes out of it.** REB.


²⁸ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 180.

There is a quite intriguing verse at Matthew 11:13 - **All the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John came.**²⁹ Many of the accusations against Jesus and His followers had to do with the fact that He was accused of denying Scriptural authority. The issue of Law-Keeping was a symptom not the heart of the accusation. Over and over again Jesus confirms Scriptural authority and that what He is doing, and will do, is in response to that authority and is in fact a fulfilling of what has been prophesied. This is one of the major emphases of Matthew in his Gospel. In 11:13 Matthew links what is happening in the ministry of Jesus with the fulfillment which has now arrived in the form of Jesus. “The Torah, then, is not God’s last word to his people, but is in a sense provisional, looking forward to a time of fulfillment through the Messiah.”³⁰

On this understanding then, the Law and the Prophets are not in fact abolished. Their role will no longer be the same as it was before the coming of Jesus. It will therefore be the task set before the followers of Jesus to carefully discern, in the light of His teaching, that of the Apostles, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit

²⁹ CEB.

³⁰ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, pp. 182-183.



the right way to apply these texts in the new situation that, for them, is coming and for us is now in play.³¹ The church has been, and continues to struggle with this process of discernment. God calls His children to be faithful to His nature, His love, and above all, to His mercy. But for the mercy of God none of us would be saved. This must be an ever-present fixture in our understanding. When mercy is forgotten we are transformed into legalists and forget from where we have come and we forget the source of our hope in Christ.

At 5:19-20, Jesus makes it clear that His followers are to keep the commands of God, not in some literal, legalistic, and ritualistic way, but from the depths of the heart and soul. This is the beginning of the Gospel not its totality. More is to be revealed, and as we now understand, the role of the Spirit of God is crucial. He will act as an arbiter, an interpreter, an inspiration, and as a source of truth. It is only through God's merciful help that it is possible to have greater righteousness than the legal experts of Israel.

³¹ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 183.

At 5:21-26 we come to some of the practical ways that Jesus expects the Law to be fulfilled. Jesus begins in 5:21-22 by commenting upon murder. In commenting upon murder Jesus certainly does not lower the bar, He raises it considerably. He highlights the making of disparaging remarks about a brother or a sister to the danger level of risking to condemn oneself to the fires of hell. The words of Jesus here are stark, blunt, and very much to the point. Jesus says that calling someone “stupid,” “dull,” or an “idiot” (μωρός - *moros*³²) will risk making one guilty and liable to the fires of hell. Who among us is not guilty of this? It is wrong, and Jesus states this fact as powerfully and crisply as is possible. He equates it with “murder.” The principle here is that the actual committing of murder is only the outward manifestation of an inward attitude, which is in, and of itself, culpable whether it actually results in physical murder or not.³³

Verses 23-26 continue highlighting examples of what it means to fulfill the Law. Verses 23-24 indicate that bringing a gift to the altar while leaving a brother or sister with something against you is disingenuous and one should leave the gift there

³² The word behind our English word “moron.”


³³ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 199.

and go and make things right with them and then come back and complete the offering. The act of contrition does not actually indicate a contrite and forgiving heart. In verses 25 and 26, Jesus challenges people to be reconciled with those who have a dispute against them. Ultimately all people will face judgment for what they have done and what is in their heart, and if we have wronged another it will come back against us and we will pay. Again, the focus is on more than just the surface, more than just the going through the motions, but it is upon the actual motives, and attitudes of the heart. Jesus weaves together the hope for a new way, a new kingdom that is breaking in and challenging the old order, the old ways. This is the beginning point for creating that new and better kingdom, in the heart of man that has been for so long darkened and tainted by selfishness, fear, disobedience to God, and futility.

Synopsis

As Jesus begins to teach those gathered to hear Him He lays out His manifesto. The kingdom of heaven will stand in stark contrast to the kingdom of the world. The values held near and dear by this world will be cast aside and those that are so often ridiculed and discouraged are held up as values greatly prized by God and in the kingdom of heaven. Those that will be blessed by God are those regarded as too weak, too humble, too focused on righteousness, too merciful, and too focused on purity of heart by the standards of this world. Such people are often persecuted and harassed and it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.

Jesus calls upon those listening to His words to have a positive effect on the world. He calls upon them to act as seasoning, as preservative, to keep bringing true flavor to life. He calls upon them to be useful as kingdom people and not to be useless and something that will only be good as something to be discarded and trampled. They are to be light and to be and to do



things that cause people to praise God because of the way their good thoughts and deeds shine before others.

Jesus also challenges his audience to do more than just observe the letter of the Law. He challenges them to do more than just act out of ritual obligation. He challenges them to fulfill the true intent of the Law and to strive for the transformation of their hearts and their souls into becoming what God created them to be. Their actions will run deeper than their practice and their actions, and instead will have roots in their hearts as the outgrowth of people transformed by God. They will be people truly transformed, merciful, peacemakers, reconcilers, and pursuers of righteousness that is real and truly godly.

Main Points

- Jesus teaches His listeners the values and ways of the kingdom of heaven.
- Jesus also teaches His listeners that His words are meant to elicit a response.
- Jesus challenges His listeners to be useful and functional in the world as agents of God.
- Jesus challenges His audience to fulfill the Law rather than just keep it.
- Jesus teaches a different perspective on resistance of evil and persecution for doing what is right in the eyes of God.

Questions

1. What are some things that you consider to be a blessing in your life?
2. Where are some places that you go to calm your spirit?
3. What are some of the core values by which you live your life?
4. How do you seek to fulfill the needs of your spirit?
5. What are some ways that you pursue the kingdom of God?
6. What are some things that have caused you to mourn in your life?
7. What is your view of people that are humble? Why?
8. Why do you think humility is a trait valued by God?
9. What are some ways that you pursue what is right in your life?
10. Why do you think Jesus indicates that demonstrating mercy is crucial to receiving mercy?
11. What are some ways that you seek to remain pure of heart?
12. What are some ways that people can be peacemakers?
13. What are some ways that you have seen people destroy peace?
14. When is a time in your life when you have been harassed, or persecuted because of doing the right thing and having the right attitude?
15. When is a time in your life when you have rejoiced because

you were persecuted or insulted?

16.What are some ways that you promote the in-breaking of the kingdom of heaven?

17.How do you seek to be a beacon of light for the good news of God to the world?

18.Do you believe that Christians are required to keep the Law today? Why, or why not?

19.What are some ways that you can keep the letter of a law and break its intent?

20.What are some ways that you seek to be righteous before God?

21.Do you rely upon being righteous for your salvation?

22.Why do you think Jesus connects anger with murder in some sense?

23.Why do you think calling another person a “fool” puts one in danger of the fires of hell?

24.What does Jesus say regarding disputes with others and how those should be dealt with?

To Take Home

What is Important to know?

It is important to know that the standards that the world holds in high regard are contrary to the standards valued by God. The justice and righteousness that are so often held up as the high standards in our society are often contrary to the standards of God. In this section, Jesus sets out to correct many misconceptions. What are some ways that you seek to understand the will of God for your life?

Where is God in these words?

God is in these words explaining the differences between the standards of the world and the standards of God. Mankind's sense of justice and mercy varies significantly from what Jesus describes as those which lead one into blessing in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus seeks to teach those listening to Him these truths. What are some things that you find in the words of Jesus to be shocking, or perhaps are disconcerting?

What does any of this mean for how I live my life?

Each of us pursues an agenda as we make decisions regarding how we live our life. That agenda sets the course for what you value, and the choices that you make. Some people pursue money and power. Some people pursue family and personal safety and security. If you were to state quite simply the priorities that Jesus challenges His audience to pursue what would they be?

What is the word of God calling us to do?

The word of God here is calling us to examine our priorities for doing the things we do and for pursuing the things we pursue. Jesus sets out the goals and standards valued by God and indicates that God rewards those who live in the pursuit of these goals and standards. So much of what Jesus says here stands not only in opposition to the standards of the world, but also stands in opposition to the standards of American society. What are some ways that you see the teachings of Jesus in this chapter as standing in opposition to American society? How do you think Jesus calls us as His followers to respond to those differences?