

A Study of the Christ

Text

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Sermon on the Mount	5:1-48		6:17-26	

Overriding Principles

- Spirituality is often understood quite differently from the way God sees it.
- Jesus is the ultimate interpreter of God (cf. Jn. 1:18).

Main Point

- Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill (Matt. 5:17).

Secondary Points of History, Culture, Words, and Grammar

- Spirituality (kingdom living) is centered in attitudes (**Matt. 5:3-12; Lk. 6:20-26**).
- Though sounding like the word "attitude," the word "beatitude" comes from a Latin word, *beatus*, meaning *blessed or happy*. The Greek word introducing each attitude of heart is μακάριος, which also means *blessed or happy*.
- Each of the beatitudes relates to an Old Covenant teaching dealing with the values God cherishes. They also describe those who would participate in the Messianic Kingdom (cf. Ps. 40:17; 26:1; 109:16; Isa. 61:1-3; Ps. 37:11; Isa. 55:1; Ps. 51:1; Ps. 24:4; II Chron. 36:16).
- The *poor in spirit* represent those who come to God in humility, not in pride; those who come to receive because they have nothing to offer. They have the courage to admit their spiritual bankruptcy. The Old Testament often spoke of the poor not to emphasize their economic woes, but to emphasize their confidence in God regardless deprivations. These would be the people who found the true value of God's kingdom (**Matt. 5:3**; cf. Lk. 18:9-14; Isa. 64:6; Ps. 37:14; 40:17; 69:28-33; Prov. 16:19; 29:23; Isa. 61:1).

- *Those who mourn* are those who can be touched by the consequences of their own sins as well as the sins of others. Comfort comes to such (**Matt. 5:4**; cf. Ps. 51; 119:136; Isa. 61:1-3; E zek. 9:4).
- *The meek or gentle* represent those with no pretence about them, men and women who are strong enough to be gentle when the flesh would be otherwise. The *earth* they would *inherit* refers to a spiritual enrichment, as with Isaiah 32:13-20; Acts 3:19-21 (**Matt. 5:5**; cf. I Pet. 3:4, 14-15; Matt. 11:29; Jas. 3:13; Ps. 37:9, 11, 29).
- *Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness* are the passionate searchers who can only be satisfied by God. To seek what is right is to seek God Himself. Augustine said, "Our souls are restless until they find rest in You" (**Matt. 5:6**; cf. Ps. 42:2; 63:1; Amos 8:11-14; Matt. 7:7-11).
- *The merciful* are believers who practice both forgiveness and compassion. God shows no mercy to those who do not practice it (**Matt. 5:7**; cf. Matt. 6:12, 14-15; 18:21-35; Lk. 17:3-5; Matt. 9:36-38).
- *The pure in heart* are people who possess two critical attributes; they have an inner moral purity as well as a singleminded, undivided loyalty. Wholeness and purity cannot exist except that they exist together. The pure heart is the heart that sees God (**Matt. 5:8**; Deut. 10:16; 30:6; I Sam 15:22; Ps. 24:3-4; 5:4-17; Gen. 50:5-6; Prov. 22:11; Matt. 7:24).
- *Peacemakers* are those who bring troubled souls to God. In the Messianic Age; the Prince of Peace can accept nothing short of the peace that God alone can give. In the days of the Christ, the Romans prided themselves on the peace maintained by their mighty armies. The Roman writer E p i c t e t o s, however, summed up the inadequacies of the Roman Peace by writing, "... while the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief, and envy. He cannot give peace of heart for which man yearns more than even for outward peace" (**Matt. 5:9**; Jn. 14; 27; 16:33; Prov. 15:1; Isa. 52:7; Lk. 24:36; Rom. 10:15; 12:18; I Cor. 7:15; E p h. 2:11-22; Heb. 12:14; I Pet. 3:11).
- All the attitudes of heart Jesus covers in the preceding beatitudes, culminating in the peacemaker who uses them all, paradoxically find themselves faced with persecution! What a shame it is that the virtues the world often claims to love, it actually hates. Know this; opposition is the normal condition of those who would follow Jesus. And yet, there is joy even here (**Matt. 5:10-12**; cf. Jn. 15:18-25; Acts 14:22; I T i m. 3:12; I Pet. 4:13-14; esp. **Lk. 6:26**; Col. 1:24; Jas. 1:2-4; I Pet.

1:6, 8; 4:13; Rev. 19:7; Lk. 1:47; 10:21; Jn. 5:35; 8:56; Acts 2:26; 16:34; II Chron. 24:21; Neh. 9:26; Jer. 20:2; Matt. 21:35; 23:32-37; Acts 7:52; I Thess. 2:15).

- The three woes of **Luke 6:24-26** show the other side of the persecution coin. God's people will suffer opposition and persecution from those who choose worldly, selfish values, but woe to those who choose such values (Gen 12:1-3; I Thess. 1:5-12).
- Attitudes of heart are required if we are to have the kind of influence that will preserve, enrich, and enlighten the world. Salt preserves and gives taste, light reveals and clarifies. If we are not salt and light we are worthless in the most profound way. If our saltiness and illumination are not according to kingdom values, they are ineffective and valueless (**Matt. 5:13-16**; cf. Mk. 4:21; 9:50; Lk. 8:16; 11:33; 14:34-35).
- We will do well to listen carefully to what Jesus says about His purpose in the Sermon on the Mount. In the words of **Matthew 5:17-20** we find that Jesus is not opposing Moses; He is rather giving the fullness of Moses in contrast to the narrow, self-serving interpretations of the Pharisees (cf. Deut. 1:5; 10:10; II Chron. 19:1-11).
- The NASB translation has "abolish" in **Matthew 5:17**. This is an unfortunate rendering, "destroy" being the intent. Jesus did abolish the Law and the Prophets (Eph. 2:14-15) as being part of a binding covenant by fulfilling them. He did not destroy them; they continue to have value today as the inspired word of God. They still show us God and they still reflect the eternal values inherent in His holy nature (Heb. 8:1-13; Rom. 15:4; II Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17; Heb. 13:8).
- An additional emphasis of **Matt. 5:17-20** is the uncompromising loyalty Jesus had to the word of God. No part of it was negotiable. All of it was pertinent. Even the least law of a binding covenant is never to be rejected or amended. While Jesus often demonstrated that there was more to a given passage than had been understood in its full biblical context, He never discounted any passage as being without value in its proper context (Matt. 23:23; Heb. 2:1-3; Matt. 4:4; Gal. 3:15).
- In **Matthew 5:21-48** Jesus offers six contrasts between the way God's law was traditionally understood and the way God intended it to be understood.
- Murder—it's more than you think! Murder does not generally occur in a vacuum, it is the conclusion of a series of steps. Therefore, any step taken in its direction,

regardless of whether it actually results in murder, is a step too far away from God (**Matt. 5:21-26**; Ex. 20:13; cf. Deut. 16:18).

- Adultery—it too is more than you think! The act of adultery begins in the mind. Sexual sins require the mind to give inappropriate attention to hormones. The opposite sex is designed to be appealing, that is not the problem—it is an unlawful thought or action that is a sin. The fact that Jesus deals with the thoughts of men rather than those of women does not mean women cannot sin in their thoughts—men, however, must be more on guard. Modesty of dress, movement, and language are all significant factors in this concern. The literalness of dismemberment is a hyperbole to emphasize the seriousness of the matter (**Matt. 5:27-30**; Ex. 20:14; cf. Gal. 3:19; I Cor. 6:9).
- Divorce—God hates it! From the beginning God has never endorsed divorce and He has given only one exception to allow it. The “and” introducing this two verse section links it to the adultery introduced in **verse 27**. Marriage is God’s designated place for sexual activity, and only an unlawful sexual expression can legally break a marriage. If anyone accepts the validity of a divorce not for fornication and then remarries, it is sin. The only acceptable remarriage for a divorced person is a remarriage where sexual misconduct was engaged in by one’s mate. The Old Testament passage in question here, Deuteronomy 24:1-4, did not actually prescribe divorce. It, when properly translated, simply mentions divorce in a rather involved “if—then” scenario. Hence Moses did not command, but merely permitted divorce (did not deal actively with it) because of the hardness of the people’s hearts (**Matt. 5:31-32**; Deut. 24:1-4 cf. Matt. 19:1-12; Mal. 2:13-16; Gen. 1:27; 2:24; 5:2).
- False vows—taken where God did not intend! Vows were to be between an individual and God or for legal agreements that would affect parties beyond the individuals involved in a transaction, not for interpersonal relationships. Not only had the Pharisees taken the idea of vows from their proper expression, they had distorted them into a dishonest game designed to defraud. They chose some things that would bind a vow while they allowed other things to not be of binding force. To swear by the temple was not binding, to swear by the gold of the temple was—how foolish and dishonest! Regarding vows, the courts cannot take one litigant’s word over another’s, hence vows were in order to establish legal matters. Additionally, God’s exalted nature made a more solemn commitment to Him by men altogether

appropriate. In interpersonal relationships, however, our word is to be our bond (**Matt. 5:33-37**; Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Deut. 5:11; 6:3; 23:21-23; cf. Num. 6:1-8; Matt. 23:16-22; 26:63-64; Gen. 21:22-34).

- Eye for eye, tooth for tooth—another teaching taken from its context! The standard of justice for Hebrew courts was that the punishment fit the crime; this was not a standard for personal vengeance. We are to do what we can to diffuse and settle matters short of the court. Government, and those it duly authorizes as its agents, are the vehicle for punishment in God's system of things. We are to actually go farther than duty demands so as to encourage good. Rome could compel a Jew to carry baggage for a soldier the distance of a mile. The Jews hated this and did it most grudgingly; Jesus said go two miles. A backhanded slap was a supreme insult; Jesus said, turn the other cheek. (**Matt. 5:38-42**; Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21; cf. Rom. 12:17-13:5; consider the influence of the "good man" Rom. 5:7; the good man does more than he is duty bound to do, the righteous man, in this comparison, does his duty, but not beyond).
- Love your neighbor and hate your enemy—a hateful addition! God had indeed said, "love your neighbor," but He had not said "hate your enemy." The Pharisees had even restricted the meaning of neighbor to mean Jews, and Jews that met their approval at that (cf. Lk. 10:25-37; Matt. 9:10-13). Much to the contrary of the hatred of the Pharisees, Jesus taught love of enemies and prayer for those who persecute us. Otherwise, what have we done more than express a common selfish greeting to those who are just like us? Our standard for true completeness and holiness is no less than God Himself. This is a fitting close to this section of the Sermon on the Mount. The standard is God, and the interpreter of God is Jesus (Jn. 1:18; 14:7-9). As God is well rounded in His character, so must we be (**Matt. 5:43-48**; Lev. 19:18; cf. Lev. 19:9-10, 33-34; Lev. 19:2).

Relationship to the Church

- The heart is the place God first considers.
- Attitudes define who we really are.
- Acceptable influence is impossible apart from being a godly person.
- Christian virtues are quite different from the "virtues" the world practices.
- Persecution will follow Christlikeness.

- We should not try to minimize God's will to suit a checklist mentality; we should try to explore the full implications of God's intentions.
- As the noted theologian, Barney Fife so eloquently put it, "Nip it in the bud."
- Marriage remains sacred in God's eyes.
- Our integrity ought to seal the validity of our words.
- Vengeance is for God and government.
- Love is for all.
- God, as best seen in Jesus, is the only acceptable standard for our conduct.

Who is Jesus?

- He is the Master Teacher!
- In Jesus we see a man of complete integrity.
- He neither played games nor accommodated them when played by others.
- He is our best friend who would have us reach our full potential and thus derive our greatest joy.