



LIFE IN THE KINGDOM

MEMORIZE THE TRUTH

Matthew Lesson 6 - Matthew 5

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Matthew 5:43-44

MATTHEW 5:1-12 - The Beatitudes

1. According to 5:3-10, Jesus said that eight types of people possess great blessings. What are the groups and the blessings? Write an X beside any groups that you do not usually think of as being blessed.
2. What does the fact that God blesses people in these seemingly undesirable conditions suggest to you about life in God's kingdom compared with life as we often understand it?
3. What response did Jesus say people should have when they are persecuted because of Him? Why?

MATTHEW 5:13-16 - Kingdom Influence

4. Jesus used salt and light to illustrate the impact His disciples would have on the world around them. What are some uses for salt?
5. What do you think it means to be spiritually salty? What differences might you notice between a Christian who is spiritually salty and one who has lost that saltiness?

LEARN THE TRUTH

Have you ever been in one of the groups of blessed people and experienced the blessing that Jesus mentioned for that particular group? If so, what was that experience like? Plan to discuss this in your small group.

6. What does light do for us? (Think about its effect on our daily lives, on plants, on the land, and so on.)
7. How can followers of Jesus have similar effects on the people and situations around them?

MATTHEW 5:17-26 - The True Law

8. What did Jesus say He had come to do? Why might He have chosen to emphasize this truth?

9. From 5:21-22, what was the old standard Jesus's disciples had heard? What did Jesus teach about God's true standard?

10. For what reason did Jesus instruct a person to interrupt his or her worship? Why do you think this issue matters so much to God?

MATTHEW 5:27-37 - Adultery, Divorce, and Swearing Falsely

11. What was the standard command people typically heard regarding adultery? In contrast, what did Jesus say?

12. What was Jesus's teaching regarding divorce?

13. How does our society sometimes disregard or dishonor the high view of marriage that God established? (See also Genesis 2:22-24; Matthew 19:4-6; Ephesians 5:22-33.)

14. People today do not generally say things such as "I swear by Jerusalem that I am telling the truth." How might we apply Jesus's teaching in Matthew 5:33-37 today?

MATTHEW 5:38-48 - Response to Unjust Treatment and Love for Enemies

15. What standards did people typically follow when responding to unjust treatment? In contrast, what did Jesus say to do?

16. How are Jesus's followers supposed to treat their enemies? What reason did Jesus give for this instruction?

17. Why is it better to love our enemies instead of hating them?

APPLY THE TRUTH

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (5:4). God cares about people who are grieving. He offers blessing and forgiveness for those who grieve and repent of their sin (see James 4:8-9). He receives the prayers of broken and contrite hearts (see Psalm 51:17). He also shows His love to those who have experienced suffering and tragedy (see 2 Corinthians 1:4). Those who are grieving loss can find blessing in God's comfort today and find hope in the truth of resurrection. How does Jesus's promise of comfort for the mourning affect your perspective on what grieves you today? Plan to talk about this in your small group.



LEARN MORE

Life in the Kingdom

Matthew 5

Matthew 5–7 records what is commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount. In this talk, so named because Jesus gave it on a mountainside, He defined life in the kingdom of heaven. He described what life is like when we live under His rule and reign. When Jesus proclaimed, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (4:17), the King Himself was doing the teaching. We cannot fully understand the message of the kingdom apart from relationship with the King. God wants to transform us into people who will live in the ways of His kingdom.

A Sermon About the Kingdom

Jesus started His sermon with a list of the types of people who are blessed when He rules and reigns among them. Christians have come to call these statements the Beatitudes. This term comes from the Latin word meaning “blessed.” These words were real and relevant to the people Jesus was speaking to. The crowds who heard Him were physically and spiritually needy, grieving, and suffering. And when Jesus spoke of persecuted and mistreated people, He was describing a future His disciples would face with Him.

Some of the Beatitudes describe conditions that bring great need—spiritual poverty and hunger, mourning, and persecution. It would seem that people in these conditions are disadvantaged. But these people experience the benefits of being in right relationship with their heavenly Father—perhaps better than those who consider their lives sufficient. Because of these things, they are truly blessed.

The remaining Beatitudes focus on heart conditions that please God. Jesus commended the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers. Mercy is at the heart of God’s law. Jesus made it clear that God desires mercy more than sacrifices (see 9:13). Purity of heart contrasts with ritual purity that is only an outward pretense. When our hearts are cleansed and set on pursuing God and His ways, we can see Him in all His purity and glory. This promise of seeing God will be fulfilled only partially in this life. But when Christ returns, we will see God fully (see 1 John 3:2).

Making peace is important because peace does not simply happen on its own. Someone must desire reconciliation strongly enough to be willing to enter the conflict and seek peace. Through Christ’s work on the cross, God made peace between Jews and Gentiles. People who act like their heavenly Father by doing what is required to bring peace will be identified as His children.

Think about the surprising benefits of need. We often think of need and lack—both physical and spiritual—as conditions to be avoided or fixed as soon as possible. But often these conditions provide a place where God can enter our lives and grow our dependence on and joy in Him. Need and lack can create space for us to experience God’s presence and care in deeper ways. And spiritual poverty and hunger can draw us toward a greater understanding of God’s grace and truth.

“You are the salt of the earth,” Jesus told His disciples. Salt is often used to preserve food or enhance its flavor. Like salt, Jesus intended for His followers to be a preservative against evil and a flavoring for good. Their lives should affect the world around them. If not—if their saltiness has “lost its taste”—they have lost their purpose. Jesus also talked about His disciples being “the light of the world”—a light that cannot be hidden. Jesus expects His disciples to shine His light on those around them and bring glory to God.

The Law Fulfilled

Next, Jesus addressed the place of Moses’s Law in God’s kingdom. One of the main criticisms against Jesus and His disciples was that they did not follow the Law. However, in teaching about the Law, Jesus not only refuted that charge, but He also showed great respect for what God truly intended in His commandments.

Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Abolish means “to destroy, demolish, or overthrow.” Jesus made it clear that He was not discarding what was written in the Old Testament. In fact, He said that not the smallest detail of the Law would pass away until “all is accomplished.” He had come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. He was teaching their true interpretation. He was perfectly obeying them. And He was accomplishing the messianic prophecies.

Jesus then made a surprising statement. He said His listeners would need to be more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus’s audience was probably amazed. How could ordinary people be more righteous than their religious leaders? But the righteousness Jesus talked about comes from a right heart. Right actions are important, but understanding God’s true intent is vital too.

Think about heart attitudes. The Pharisees worked on their outward appearance of obeying God. But internally they were full of pride, hatred, and selfishness. They failed to address what really mattered—the heart. In contrast, Jesus emphasized the motivation behind our actions. On our own, though, our hearts lack the love and pure intentions Jesus desires. Our hearts must be cleansed and renewed by His Spirit. A heart connected to and focused on the Father will produce attitudes and actions that conform to His desires.

Jesus presented the kingdom view on murder. The traditional Jewish view on murder focused on the outward act. But Jesus said that what happens in the heart is also serious: “Everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.” In God’s kingdom, anger itself is violence against another.

Jesus made a similar statement about sexual sin. “Everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart,” Jesus said. Every sin begins with impurity in the heart. The religious leaders had hard hearts (see 19:8). They did not value the spirit of God’s instructions. They promoted an easy-divorce policy. But Jesus’s teaching highlighted the serious implications of breaking a marriage.

The religious leaders had developed a complex system of oaths (which Jesus condemned in Matthew 23). But Jesus instructed, “Do not take an oath at all.” “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil” (5:34, 37). When people are following God’s ways from the heart, their words can be trusted.

Life in the kingdom of heaven includes generosity and grace. God transforms us into people who overcome evil with kindness and goodness. Jesus instructed, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” This response is possible only if we are empowered by His Spirit. God wants us to give up retaliation. But He also calls us to go further and love even those who do not love us.

In following Jesus’s commands, we base our actions on who our Father is. We begin to live in His kingdom as His sons and daughters. We pattern ourselves after His thoughts, ways, feelings, and responses. In doing so, we begin to fulfill Jesus’s call to “be perfect, as [our] heavenly Father is perfect.” Life in the kingdom is not about rule keeping and outward actions. Rather, kingdom living is being transformed from the heart so that we become different people. We follow Jesus and His ways and learn from Him. As we do, we are changed.

PERSONALIZE THE TRUTH

Jesus said we should love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. You may not have an enemy in the extreme sense. But even so, you probably have someone in your life whom you find difficult to love. Perhaps there is someone who misunderstands you or always seems to oppose you, or even someone you do not like very much. Praying for that person, as Jesus said to do, is a great first step toward loving him or her. When we are interceding with God on someone’s behalf, it is more difficult to maintain a grudge. Take a few minutes now to pray for the person you struggle to love. Ask God to help you overcome obstacles that prevent you from praying so that you can continue to pray for this person.