



SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Course 4, *The Promised One*, Lesson 8

The Problem: One of the major problems that Jesus faced in His ministry was to convince the people of the true nature of the kingdom. The Jews of His day had applied the passages of the Old Testament that speak of the kingdom of glory to be established at the second advent of Christ to His work during His first advent. They were looking for a political and economic benefactor who would enable them to throw off the Roman yoke and establish the national superiority of Israel. The priests, rabbis, and rulers had fanned the people's hope of national and personal prosperity. The poor among the people looked longingly for better times when the Messiah would win for them wealth, security, and a life of ease. The wealthy, influential leaders envisioned themselves as national rulers, commanding the respect and homage of other nations.

All these delusions of grandeur Jesus attempted to dispel. The cross must precede the crown. Jesus came for the first time not to rule but to bear the punishment for human sin. His concern was to convince people that, first and foremost, His kingdom is spiritual. The glory of the hereafter is only for those who, in the here and now, enter into the kingdom of grace. Unless we emulate Jesus by fighting the good fight of faith, trusting God, and putting away all sin, we cannot qualify as citizens of the kingdom of glory. The life of righteousness by faith is the prerequisite to the life of immortality in the universal kingdom of God. Christ first wants our hearts to be purified by His Spirit; He seeks to bring us into full accord with the spiritual principles of heaven. Then, He will later bestow upon us the benefits of the eternal kingdom. First comes a life controlled by His grace; second, a life of untrammelled joy in the mansions beyond.

The Sermon on the Mount outlines simply and beautifully the principles of God's government. Jesus led the multitudes who were following Him to a grassy slope by the lake. Taking His place on the upper part of the hillside, He invited the people to be seated and then taught them the sacred truths that would change their lives. He did not offer glory and wealth; He offered love, forgiveness, divine blessing, and the power to cope with the trials and difficulties of everyday existence. He made it clear that, above all, God wants purity and holiness of heart. His kingdom is one where kindness, unselfishness, and righteousness reign supreme. Such attitudes implanted in the life by the Holy Spirit prepare a person for the soon-coming kingdom of glory.

The Sermon on the Mount provides a comprehensive outline of the principles by which Christ would have us live. In this lesson, we will take a quick overview of some vital parts of Christ's teaching.

Objectives:

- I. We study the meaning of the Beatitudes, or blessings, which Jesus pronounced upon certain people.
- II. We consider the spiritual message of God's law.
- III. We note the true motive for service.
- IV. We study the Lord's prayer.
- V. We consider Jesus' opposition to a judgmental, critical spirit.

I. THE BEATITUDES (OR BLESSINGS)

Jesus pronounced special blessings on people who experience certain trials, have certain longings, or adopt certain attitudes. The encouraging thing is that God blesses people who, for one reason or another, are looked down upon or rejected by their fellow human beings.

The Word:

1. What eight kinds of people are especially blessed by God? Matthew 5:1-12.
2. The 8 points below correspond to those in point (1) above. Read the texts beside each point and briefly describe the eight kinds of people Jesus was blessing
 - a. Isaiah 57:15
 - b. Psalm 51:1-7; 1 Thessalonians 4:13
 - c. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8
 - d. Psalm 143:6; John 4:14
 - e. Romans 15:1-3; Psalm 41:1-3
 - f. Psalm 24:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 4:3
 - g. Galatians 5:22; Psalm 119:165
 - h. 1 Peter 2:21-23

Explanation: There is a fascinating progression of thought in the 8 Beatitudes. The person who is poor in spirit tends to look down on himself because of his spiritual poverty. He mourns his sin and seeks Christ's forgiveness. Such a person is meek and humble because he knows his own weakness and total dependence on God. He cries out to God to supply his need by bestowing Christ's righteousness upon him. He will always be merciful to others who are weak because he can identify with them. In Christ, he cherishes purity of heart and mind; he knows how sin destroys his own peace of mind and his relationship with others. Since he enjoys the peace of the justified believer (Romans 5:1), he is able to bring peace and joy to other people. He is a peacemaker because his own heart is right with God. When he is persecuted and reviled, he does not become angry and bitter. The peace of Christ in his soul enables him to say to Jesus, "Father, forgive them."

Relevance: The 8 steps outlined in the Beatitudes are stages in Christian growth. At every stage, you can claim the promise of Jesus and enter into the experience He has for you.

II. THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE LAW

When we read the Ten Commandments, it is easy to think of Christianity as a series of do's and don'ts. Jesus' interpretation of the commandments proves that each one of them has a deep spiritual significance. Outward conformity is not enough, Jesus said. The spirit of the law is obeyed only when its divine principles are ruling in our hearts.

The Word:

3. How important is every one of God's commandments? Matthew 5:17-19.
4. How great must our righteousness be if we are to enter the kingdom of heaven? Matthew 5:20.
5. What deeper meaning did Jesus give to the letter of the sixth commandment? Matthew 5:21-22
6. How did Jesus interpret the seventh commandment? Matthew 5:27.

Explanation: Jesus made it clear that He did not come to diminish the requirements of the law in any way. Rather, He fulfilled the law by keeping it perfectly and urged us to strive for the same standard (see Matthew 5:48). He warned that breaking God's commandments and teaching others to do the same is a grave sin. However, Jesus also emphasized that righteousness and salvation are not earned through commandment-keeping. As He said, 'Without me, you can do nothing' (John 15:5). His point was that only through union with Him can we experience true heart-righteousness—something the legalistic Pharisees could not achieve. While they prided themselves on outward obedience, their hearts remained unyielded. As Paul explained, 'For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God' (Romans 10:3).

Paul goes on to explain how such self-righteousness can be overcome: “*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes*” Romans 10:4. This does not mean that Christ abolished the law; Matthew 5:17-19 affirms otherwise. Rather, Christ is the end of the law *as a means* of achieving righteousness for those who believe in Him. When we place our trust in Christ, He imparts His righteousness to us through the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9-10). This transformative experience frees us from the futile attempt to earn righteousness through our own efforts. Obedience to God's law, then, is not a means of achieving righteousness but the result of Christ's gift of Himself to us through the Spirit. This gift produces a righteousness far greater than anything displayed by the outwardly focused Pharisees.

Relevance: Jesus emphasized three key principles in His teaching: (1) every detail of God's law is important and should be obeyed; (2) genuine obedience must come from the heart, and this is only possible through the free gift of His righteousness; (3) true obedience goes beyond outward actions, such as avoiding murder or adultery—it transforms the mind, removing hatred and lust. This purity is a divine gift from God, enabling you to live as a truly law-keeping Christian. (See Romans 8:3-4).

Through the righteousness of Jesus, you can be empowered from within to obey God's law. Does this resonate with you? See John 14:15; 15:10; Revelation 12:17.

III. THE TRUE MOTIVE FOR SERVICE

Jesus condemned service for self-exaltation. The Pharisees claimed to be strictly obedient to God's law, but in fact, their motivation was self-glory. The spirit of the Pharisees is the spirit of humanity in all ages. Jesus contrasted His spirit and methods with that of mankind generally. He argued that service is to be motivated by unselfish love for others.

The Word:

7. In what way are we to perform acts of kindness to others? Matthew 6:1-4.
8. What kind of prayer did Jesus reject? What kind of prayer is acceptable to Him? Matthew 6:5-8.
9. What was Jesus' answer to materialism? Matthew 7:19-21

Explanation: The Bible consistently condemns pride as one of the most offensive sins in the sight of God. Pride was the sin that led to Lucifer's fall in heaven (Isaiah 14:12-14) and the defining sin of the Pharisees. Acts of generosity performed for self-glorification are a tragic display of pride. Likewise, praying publicly with the intent of gaining praise reveals a love for self rather than Christ. Jesus did not teach that all acts of kindness must be done in secret. For instance, Paul commended the Macedonian Christians for their generosity, which was well-known (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). The key point was that their giving was motivated by genuine love for Christ and their fellow believers, not self-exaltation. In stark contrast, Ananias and Sapphira serve as an example of giving with wrong motives—claiming to offer all proceeds from a land sale while withholding a portion for themselves. Their deceit displeased the Lord to such an extent that He took their lives (Acts 5:1-11).

Regarding prayer, Jesus' instructions (Matthew 6:5-8) did not suggest that all public prayer is wrong. After all, He Himself prayed publicly on many occasions. Rather, He emphasized that the motive behind the prayer is critical. The Pharisees often prayed loudly and ostentatiously during stipulated prayer times to showcase their supposed piety to passers-by. Jesus condemned such practices as entirely unacceptable to God. Private prayer belongs in a quiet, personal space, and public prayer should stem from a sincere desire to express the collective needs of the congregation. When prayer becomes a performance for human admiration, it grieves the Lord.

Jesus also presented timeless wisdom regarding materialism. In every generation, the pursuit of wealth is often seen as the key to happiness. Yet, Jesus contradicted this philosophy, urging us to prioritize heavenly treasures through generous support of His work and merciful giving to those in need. Materialism erodes spirituality, while the Bible highlights “*the unsearchable riches of Christ*” Ephesians 3:8, which far exceed any earthly possessions. Other scriptures reinforce this truth: Proverbs 10:22; 13:7; 28:20; Matthew 19:23; and 1 Timothy 6:9.

Relevance: All service, whether secular or religious, is to be motivated by love for God and man. Jesus taught that the whole law of God is based on the principle of love (Matthew 22:36-40). Paul wrote that *"love is the fulfilling of the law"* Romans 13:10, and John commented, *"By this, we know that we love the children of God when we love God, and keep his commandments"* 1 John 5:2.

IV. THE LORD'S PRAYER

One of the most beautiful aspects of the Sermon on the Mount was Jesus' demonstration of how we should pray.

The Word:

10. Study the Lord's prayer and identify the following features. Matthew 6:9-13

- a. How God is addressed:
- b. Praise:
- c. Belief in the principles of God's kingdom:
- d. Request for daily spiritual and physical food:
- e. Request for forgiveness:
- f. Our forgiveness of others:
- g. Plea for protection from all evil:

11. In whose name should we pray? John 14:13-14

Explanation: Jesus' prayer serves as a model that encompasses all the essential elements for expressing our needs. It begins with acknowledging God as our loving and caring heavenly Father. Praise plays a vital role in prayer as it reflects our faith—indeed, faith is a form of praise! Within this framework, we affirm our belief in the spiritual principles Jesus has taught in His Word and plead for these principles to take root in our hearts and the hearts of others. We seek forgiveness for ourselves while expressing a readiness to forgive those who have wronged us. We also petition the Lord to shield us from all evil. Such a prayer aligns perfectly with God's will, and Jesus assured us that when we pray in this manner and in His name, He will hear and respond (1 John 5:14).

Relevance: Unselfish prayer is pleasing to God. If our prayers are driven solely by personal desires, neglecting our devotion to the Lord and the needs of others, they will not be answered (Romans 8:26). True prayer focuses on aligning our hearts with God's will and expressing love for Him and for others.

V. NOT JUDGING BUT DOING

Human beings are very imperfect judges of character. Because we do not have the insight that the Lord has, it is very likely that our attempts to judge others will be very unfair. Jesus had some vital instruction on this subject.

The Word:

12. What instruction did Jesus give on the question of judging others? Matthew 7:1-5

13. What should be our attitude if someone else falls into sin? Galatians 6:1

14. Does the church as a whole have the responsibility of judging certain situations? 1 Corinthians 5:1, 2, 13.

Explanation: Man-made religion, like that of the Pharisees, always leads to a judgmental spirit. When people think they are accepted by God because of their works, they tend to criticize those who do not act as they do. But when Christ's Spirit reigns in our hearts, instead of judging others, we have a loving concern for their welfare and salvation. When they fall into sin, we do not condemn them but try to lead them gently back to the Lord. The spirit of the golden rule will never manifest a critical, judgmental attitude. See Matthew 7:12.

There are some situations that the church as whole must judge and act upon, even though as individuals we do not have that ability or right. When a church member is living in open sin that is known to all and likely to destroy the good name of the church, the Bible teaches that we should admonish him to repent and, in the event of his refusal, revoke his membership. But always such actions must be taken in a spirit of brotherly love and deep concern. Jesus has forgiven our many sins, and we must be willing to forgive others.

Relevance: The overall emphasis of the Sermon on the Mount, of which we have studied only a part, is that Christ's presence in our hearts will render us law-abiding, loving, caring people. There can be no hate, lust, pride, or selfishness in the heart of the true follower of Jesus Christ.

If we all lived by the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, there would be no riots, murders, thefts, or wars. Society would be bound together by principles of righteousness, and every man would be at peace with God and his fellow man. Even if this ideal is not espoused by those around us, we can still live so close to Christ, that our lives are an example of Christian love and understanding. The only Bible many people will read is the one exemplified in our behavior toward them.

How can you deepen your relationship with Jesus so that His teachings from the Sermon on the Mount naturally shape your daily life?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. God has not qualified us individually to pass judgment on other's characters.
 - b. The Lord's Prayer is the only prayer we should ever pray.
 - c. Jesus did not destroy the Ten Commandments. He interpreted them.
 - d. Self-glorification is all right as long as it does not harm others.
2. Discuss: When facing any decision, the guiding question should not be, "How will this impact my personal interests?" but rather, "What would Christ have me do?" True fulfillment comes from aligning our choices with His will, even when the path may seem less advantageous in the moment. Ultimately, acting in accordance with His will always serves our best interests in the long run.

Further study: Ellen G. White, Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing.