

• A R A D I C A L L I F E •

MATTHEW 5 - 7 | SERMON OF THE MOUNT



# Introduction

The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 is probably the best known part of Jesus' teaching, but also the least understood. In this sermon, Jesus paints a vision for life so radical, that it challenges all our assumptions on what it means to live the good life.

As we journey through this sermon together, the key thing to keep in mind is that Jesus is primarily addressing his disciples (Matthew 5:1). This means that his teachings are focussed on those who have *already* entered the kingdom (i.e. under God's reign and rule).

Just prior to the sermon, Jesus proclaimed that out of darkness, a great light has dawned (4:16). Jesus, as God's promised king, is that light who will save people from their sins. These disciples have already entered the light of God's kingdom through repentance (4:17). Therefore, Jesus' words on the Sermon on the Mount are *instructions* on how to live within God's kingdom and his vision for the lives of his disciples who have already been saved.

However, you'll also notice that the crowds are listening in the entire time (7:28). This means that although Jesus' words are primarily about life within the kingdom, his teachings also invite outsiders to join his kingdom too.

In these chapters, you'll notice a big contrast between Jesus' teachings and the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees. The scribes and Pharisees were the most religious and devoted leaders of the day. They taught the Old Testament; they even memorised it! They were the beacons of righteousness for the Jews - seen by the community as heroes. So when Jesus comes, claiming that he is right and the Pharisees are wrong, it's incredibly controversial. However, Jesus exposes their surface-level righteousness and religion, which does not penetrate the heart.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls his followers to simple obedience to his words and to adopt the values of humility, love and mercy that characterise not just the kingdom, but the heart of the king himself. We invite you to evaluate your own heart and life, as Jesus challenges us to a new vision of life within his kingdom.

# Radical Blessing

“Blessed” is a term used by both the religious and secular in today’s society. However, what we mean by “blessing” can often be misunderstood. The Beatitudes (or “declarations of blessedness”) serve as an introduction to the Sermon on the Mount. They show us the characteristics of true blessing within God’s kingdom that Jesus’ followers must inhabit.

1. Describe the most blessed person you know – what makes them blessed?

## Context

Read Matthew 5:1-2 and 7:28-29.

2. Looking at the people being addressed, how does Jesus intend the Beatitudes to be treated? There could be more than one answer.
  - a. Rules or principles to be obeyed
  - b. Entry conditions into God’s kingdom
  - c. Insights into the nature of God’s kingdom
  - d. Other answers

## Observation

3. Look at each "condition" in the Beatitudes. What does each of them really mean? Give an example of someone displaying such a quality.

Phrase	Meaning	Example
Poor in Spirit (verse 3)		
Those who mourn (verse 4)		
The meek (verse 5)		
Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (verse 6)		
The merciful (verse 7)		
The pure in heart (verse 8)		
The peacemakers (verse 9)		
Those who are persecuted (verse 10)		

4. How do our descriptions of a blessed person compare to the list above?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Look at the promises in verses 3-10. How does each promise correspond to the related condition?

### **Meaning**

6. Why is the kingdom of heaven the ultimate blessing for Jesus' disciples?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. Why do you think the world would persecute the kind of people described in the Beatitudes (verse 11)?

### **Application**

8. How might the Beatitudes help us to determine or reset our goals and dreams for this life?

# Radical Witness

## Context

Jesus ends the Beatitudes with the call to accept persecution with joy. Verses 13-16 follow with the explanation of the importance of how we are witnessing for Christ. We encounter the famous verses “You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world”. The word “you” is the plural form in Greek, which means “all of you” in English.

1. Why is it important that Jesus is addressing in this way?

## Observation

In verses 3-10, Jesus speaks from a third-person perspective. However, in verses 11-16, he switches to a second-person perspective (e.g. “**You** are the salt of the world”).

2. How is this change significant?

## Meaning

3. Discuss the metaphors of “salt and light”.

<b>Salt</b>	
<i>Function in Jesus' time</i>	Enhancing taste Preserving food Acting as exchange currency
<i>Meaning for us</i>	
<b>Light</b>	
<i>Function in Jesus' time</i>	Illumination in a time without electricity
<i>Meaning for us</i>	

In Jesus' time, the salt was mainly from the Dead Sea, which was not the purest form. Due to contamination of different minerals, it was possible for the salt to lose its saltiness (verse 13).

4. As Christians, we witness for and act as representatives of Christ to our society. What is illustrated in verse 13 and 15?
  
5. What are the practical "good works" (verse 16) that Christians have been doing or can do to bring glory to God?

## Application

6. Verses 13 and 15 warn us against complacency in relation to losing our saltiness or hiding our light. In what ways can complacency affect our witness as Christians to the world?

In the book "Center Church", Timothy Keller writes about the city churches.

*"The gospel does more than connect Christians to one another; it also connects us to those in our cities who do not yet know God and who have needs we can help meet through ministries of justice and mercy. In the West, two sets of ministry concerns - emphasizing word or deed, proclamation or service - have been split off from one another..."*

*"'Conservative' ministry stresses the importance of personal morality and approves of calling people to conversion through evangelism and preaching of the gospel; 'liberal' ministry stresses social justice and rejects overt calls to convert others. But Jesus calls his disciples to both gospel messaging (urging everyone to repent and believe the gospel) and gospel neighbouring (sacrificially meeting the needs of those around them, whether they believe or not)... the two concerns must always go together."*

7. Considering the statement above, discuss some practical and effective steps for us to be "salt and light" to our community and city.



# Radical Righteousness

## Context

The “law” consists of the first five books of the Old Testament. During Jesus’ time, the scribes and the Pharisees expanded the law into 613 commands, which Jewish believers were required to follow meticulously to be accepted by God.

The essence of the law is to reveal God’s holy character, so his people can reflect that and be fit to worship Him. However, the law also shows their inability to obey every command in the law due to their sinful nature.

1. What does Jesus mean by stating verses 17 and 18? See Galatians 3:24-26.

## Observation

2. Compare Jesus’ teachings with those of the scribes and Pharisees.

<b>Verses</b>	<b>Scribes and Pharisees</b> <i>'You have heard it said'</i>	<b>Jesus</b> <i>'But I say to you'</i>
21-26		
27-30		
31-32		

3. What are the main similarities or differences between these teachings?

## **Meaning**

Jesus' interpretation of the sixth commandment "Do not murder" goes beyond the death penalty for murder in the Old Testament (Leviticus 24:17, Numbers 35:30-31). His radical principle indicates that murder is the outward manifestation of an inward attitude, which brings judgement whether or not it actually happens. This new dimension examines the heart - the motives and attitudes that underlie the act.

4. Jesus uses strong metaphoric language (e.g. tearing out your sinful eye and cutting off your sinful hand). What point is he making (Romans 8:13)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Why is Jesus' radical righteousness important for believers? Is it possible to live this lifestyle?

## **Application**

Jesus expects his disciples to have a righteousness that exceeds the Pharisees. He focuses on the heart - a person's intentions - instead of rigid obedience to the Pharisees' rules and instructions.

6. What is significant about Jesus' view of divorce (verses 31 -32) compared to the views in our society today (Matthew 19:3-9)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. How might Jesus' teachings change your perspectives concerning anger, lust or divorce?

# Radical Love

## Context

Jesus commands his disciples to have 'radical love' - a complete overhaul of our human instincts to fight for our rights and our perception of fairness. As followers of Christ, we are meant to love and pray for those who persecute us.

1. Who do you struggle to love or pray for?

## Observation

Taking an oath or swearing is using God or a sacred object to form the basis of a statement or promise. People often swear to emphasise how important the promise is for them, for example in a marriage ceremony or in court.

2. Why does Jesus seem to prohibit oaths? Should we take oaths or swear?

Jesus contradicts the Pharisees' teaching about loving your neighbours and hating your enemies (verses 43-45). Instead, he says that we should love our enemies.

3. Is Jesus criticising the law or the Pharisees' interpretation of the law?

## Meaning

4. Jesus gave three examples of not retaliating when evil is done to us (verses 39-42) with specific meanings applicable in the context of Jesus' time. What are the equivalents in our time?
  
5. Why does Jesus require his followers to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them (verses 44-47)?
  
6. Jesus finishes this part by telling his disciples that they must be perfect, as their heavenly Father is perfect (verse 48). Is it possible for Christians to become 'perfect' and live in a way that meets this standard?

## Application

7. Evil can be done to us in many ways. In light of Jesus' teachings, what could be the Christ-like response in these situations?
  - You find out that your friends have been gossiping about you behind your back.
  - You miss out on a promotion at work due to discrimination.
  - You are accused of plagiarism after your friend borrows your assignment and copies it.
  - You are in an abusive relationship.
  - You are shamed publicly on social media for something you didn't do.
  - A friend borrows money from you but never pays it back.

# Radical Religion

## Context

Jesus mentions the importance of letting our light shine before others (5:16), but he also gives three examples of doing things in private.

1. How can we reconcile both instructions?

## Observation

2. The main structure of the Lord's Prayer is worship and petition. How is this format different from the Gentiles' empty prayers?
3. Jesus contrasts receiving an earthly reward with a heavenly reward using three examples of giving, praying and fasting. What should be the difference between the conduct of the hypocrites and Jesus' disciples? Are we disqualified from receiving a heavenly reward if we are acknowledged or complimented for our good works?

## Meaning

The Lord's Prayer uses a collective "our", but Jesus' expression "your Father" is personal (verses 6, 8 and 18).

4. What is Jesus teaching us?

Jesus corrects the misunderstanding of needing to pray long prayers and states that God knows our needs in advance (verses 7-8). However, he also says to persist in prayer (Luke 18:1) and he once spent a night in prayer (Luke 6:12).

5. Why should we pray if God already knows what we need?

### **Application**

The Pharisees observe their religious practices perhaps to a fault. However, Jesus also teaches the practices of giving to the poor, praying, and fasting by saying “when you give”, “when you pray” and “when you fast”.

6. How can we apply these practices the right way?

7. Forgiveness is the only aspect of Jesus’ prayer with extra commentary, which shows its importance. What has helped or hindered you to forgive others?

# Radical Ambition

## Context

In Jesus' days, the evidence of one's wealth was in the accumulation of material possessions. When the disciples were called into a radical relationship with Jesus, each of them left the only livelihood they knew (for example as fishermen) and their earthly possessions. With no future income to depend on, Jesus knew their anxiety about basic daily needs.

## Observation

1. Unlike heavenly treasures, Jesus says that earthly treasures are subject to decay, corrosion and theft. Why do people still value earthly treasures more than heavenly treasures?
2. Material possessions are neutral in themselves. Money, for example, is simply a means of exchange. What is Jesus warning the disciples against (Luke 12:16-21) when he says not to lay up treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal?

## Meaning

3. The heart is an inner recess where God's words are hidden, where his character is revealed and where his love is poured in by the Holy Spirit. How might laying up earthly treasures impact the heart (Ezekiel 28:5)?

4. "The eye is the lamp of the body" suggests that a good vision makes a healthy body (verses 22-23). How are these two connected?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Why does Jesus use the contrast between the concerned pagans and the carefree birds to teach his disciples about life's basic needs (verses 26-30, 32)?

### **Application**

6. Reflecting on your sleepless nights, what safeguards are needed to alleviate these worries and prevent greed when we plan for our future?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. How can we store up heavenly treasures?



# Radical Relationships

## Context

There are four sections in this passage:

- judging others (verses 1-5)
- discernment regarding the Gospel (verse 6)
- prayer and petition (verses 7-11)
- a summary statement (verse 12 - linking back to 5:17)

## Observation

The judgment (verse 1) could refer to the judgment of God who knows everything (6:18b) or other people. We, as sinful people, should not judge others (verses 2-5). However, we also need to be guided, disciplined, corrected or even disciplined by other sinners in our walk with God.

1. What are the differences and similarities of “judgment” in Matthew 7: 1-5, Matthew 18: 15-17 and John 8:7?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What is the relationship between Matthew 6:11 and 7:7-11? What does it mean for us?

## Meaning

The Jews consider dogs and pigs as unclean animals. On the other hand, pearls refer to the Gospel - the most precious possession of Jesus’ disciples.

3. What is the meaning of verse 6 as Jesus says it to his disciples and not the crowds? See also Matthew 10:14.

The law is encapsulated in one simple concept - love others as yourself (Matthew 7:12, Leviticus 19:18b and Galatians 5:14).

4. Is Jesus referring to a simple concept of reciprocity (i.e. give and take) or something more (verse 12)?

### **Application**

While our sinful human tendency may tell us to build ourselves up (often at the expense of others), Jesus teaches the opposite.

5. How can we develop healthy self-awareness to recognise our own sins?
6. While recognising our own sins, how can we help others to turn away from their sins (Galatians 6:1)?

# Radical Choice

## Context

Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount with choices his listeners (his disciples and the masses) are called to make. His teachings are truly radical (verses 28-29) compared to those of other authorities (e.g. teachers of the law).

1. What are the Pharisees' teachings that prove Jesus' sermon to be radical?

## Observation

2. What makes the way to destruction easy and the way to true salvation difficult (verses 13-14)?
3. Why does Jesus reject some individuals and command them to depart from him (Matthew 6:1, 7:21-23 and Isaiah 29:13)?

## Meaning

In contrast to the workers of lawlessness, those who will enter the kingdom of heaven are the ones who do the will of the Father.

4. What does it mean to do God's will if it is not just prophesying in his name, casting out demons and doing mighty works (Acts 19:11-16)?

## Application

5. How can we discern true teaching from false teaching (verses 18-19)?

At that time, houses were generally built on alluvial sand, which would become hard in summer. The problem was not **where the house was built** (rock or sand), but **whether a foundation was even built** at all (Luke 6:46-49). The wise builder dug deep into the alluvial sand and built a foundation on the bedrock. The foolish builder did not account for it. The rain loosened the alluvial sand causing the house to collapse.

6. What is one highlight from the Sermon on the Mount that you can apply practically as your foundation?

# Conclusion

We encourage you to take seriously Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount. If you do, your life will be a blessing to the world and a powerful witness to the Gospel. Living God's way is surely not easy, but it is the most joyful and satisfying way to live. As we do, we reflect the heart and character of the Lord Jesus himself, who through his mercy and radical love experienced death to give us eternal life. Pray that as a church, we will be marked by this radical vision of new life in Christ.