

Best Sermon Ever!

A Study of the Sermon on the Mount

By Pastor Ben Johnson

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The Sermon on the Mount, chapters 5-7 in the Gospel of Matthew, contains the most important teachings of Jesus. The Sermon begins with the Beatitudes, and their call to humility, peacemaking, purity, and righteousness, and continues on to sharp condemnations of anger, lust, revenge, and hypocrisy, and then to the beautiful example of the Lord's Prayer. This is followed by strong admonitions against materialism, worry, and judging others. But it's not all "thou shalt not," for the Sermon on the Mount ends with Jesus' encouragement for his followers to pray frequently and fervently, to live by the Golden Rule, to bear good fruit, and to build on the rock.

Enjoy this study of life!

Pastor Ben

PART 1

Matthew 5:1-16

Overview:

The Sermon on the Mount is the first of 5 major discourses in the Gospel of Matthew. Not only because it is the first & longest but it carries a critical approach and deals with ethical issues fundamental to every age & every person. This “sermon” has set into motion thousands of books and articles and shaped the Christian Church since its inception.

Traditional Lutheran approach says the whole sermon is law and its purpose is to drive us to the Gospel. But we also see Jesus puncturing self-righteous approaches to God and elevating the expectations of what a life lived in the Kingdom of God looks like.

Let's first start by looking at the context of the sermon.

Read Verses 1-2

Where is Jesus when He gives the sermon?

Look up Isaiah 2:1-3

1. What are possible connections to this prophecy?

2. Who is Jesus primarily teaching in this sermon?

Read Verses 1-12

The Sermon on the Mount opens with the beatitudes—8 statements beginning with the word *blessed*. This word affirms a state of blessing that already exists. Each beatitude declares that a group of people usually regarded as afflicted is actually blessed. Those blessed do not have to do anything to attain blessing. Jesus simply declares that they have already been blessed. They are not conditions of salvation or roadmaps to earn entry into God's blessing but the beatitudes are, first of all, declarations of God's grace.

List the godly characteristics Jesus attaches “blessed to: (verses 1-12)

1. What does “poor in Spirit” mean?
 2. How does this contrast with poor in flesh? Can a person be rich in flesh but poor in Spirit, and poor in flesh but rich in Spirit?
 3. Why is mourning a blessed character trait in this verse?
 4. Is the word “meek” a good word or a bad word to you? What words do you associate with this word?

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

What did God give Paul to keep him from boasting?

How did the Lord respond to Paul's request?

What did He say about the relationship between power and weakness?

1. Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness (compare to Matthew 6:25-34)

2. Blessed are the merciful...

a. Matthew 6:14-15

b. Matthew 18:21-35

3. Why are the “pure in heart” able to then see God?

4. Look up Colossians 1:20

a. What is our power for making peace?

5. Matthew 5:10-12

a. Why should we rejoice when we're persecuted according to Jesus?

b. What is “persecution” what are we persecuted for?

Read Matthew 5:13 (Salt of the Earth)

[Great context to this verse]

Read Matthew 5:14-16 (Light of the World)

1. Who is the “you” referring to in verse 14 at the beginning?

2. Historical/religious use of light.

3. The function of light is to illuminate...how do disciples illuminate?

4. Like the Moon & the Sun (Analogy)

Digging Deeper:

Based on the Beatitudes is the light of your life shining like a 300-watt bulb? 100-Watt bulb? a night light? How can Jesus enable you to “shine brighter”?

PART 2

Matthew 5:17-30

Verses 17-20 mark a striking turn in the teaching and ministry of Jesus. In this section Jesus is calling into question all preconceived ideas that people might have had about who He was and what He was about.

Why might Jesus have to explain his position on the Law & the Prophets based on the people who were listening to Him?

Read Matthew 5:17-18

What is Jesus saying to the reality and relevance of the OT teachings and prophecies? How does Jesus describe His role in the continuation of these teachings?

Read Matthew 5:19-20

1. What is Jesus' point about the "least" and the "greatest"?

2. What does this teach us about the significance of the Old Testament?

3. The scribes and the Pharisees were seen as the elite of the religious world...how do you see Jesus raising the bar of expectation when it comes to holiness and righteousness?

4. Is Jesus saying that unless we are perfect we will never enter the Kingdom of God? How does one go about obtaining this "surpassing righteousness"?

Let's read together:

Romans 3:21-26

Corinthians 5:16-21

Galatians 3:10-14

Now we will see Jesus raising the bar/standard/expectation of what a life lived in His Kingdom looks like. The continuation of the law and the true meaning/direction of it was believed to be fulfilled and taught by the Messiah Himself. What follows is the fulfillment of that promise.

Read Matthew 5:21-26 (ANGER)

1. What new standard of right and wrong is Jesus creating?

2. How does Jesus link anger with murder? Why?

3. What inner attitudes is He stressing by these examples?

Context: Fire of Hell/Gehenna/Valley of Hinnom

Someone might ask..."But didn't Jesus get angry? What's up with that?"

4 things that Jesus got angry at:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Is anger in itself wrong?

What kind of anger is Jesus condemning in this section?

Example 1: Verses 23-24

Setting is temple worship and the person involved is a brother.

What is Jesus main concern in this example?

Example 2: Verses 25-26

Setting is a judicial system and the person involved is an adversary.

What is Jesus main concern in this example?

Read Matthew 27-30 (LUST)

1. What new standard of right and wrong is Jesus creating?

2. What does Jesus mean by “lustful intent”?

3. Is adultery a matter of action, of the heart or both?

Read Matthew 6:22 How does impurity reach our heart?

1. Why does Jesus use such extreme language when addressing how to deal with this particular sin?

2. What part does imagination play in the beginning stages of this sin? Of any sin?

Read Corinthians 6:12-20

1. How is sexual sin different from other sins? (not better or worse but different)

2. What ultimately is our motivation for leading a sexually pure life?

Part 3

Matthew 5:31-48

Read Matthew 5:31-32 (DIVORCE)

This section is linked to the prior teaching through the Greek word “de” meaning “and”. So Jesus is saying that not only is lust the moral equivalent of adultery but so is divorce as well.

Some Rabbis allowed divorce for nearly any reason a husband wanted it. What was their casual attitude towards divorce promoting?

Read Deuteronomy 24:1-4

1. What is the main concern of this section?

2. What are reasons people get divorced in our culture?

3. What is the only allowance Jesus gives for divorce? (Mark 10, Luke 16:18, Romans 7:2-3, Malachi 2:16, Hebrews 13:4, 1 Corinthians 7:39)

The teaching of Jesus is that adultery is inviting another into the sanctity of the union. This is done with imagination and lustful intent. This is also done when a couple separates for unworthy reasons, and when either remarry they are committing adultery with this other marriage. Politically and socially you can separate for many reasons but this is different in the spiritual reality.

Read Matthew 5:33-37 (OATHS)

This section is again linked to the prior teaching and builds upon it. Incredible distinctions existed in this day. Swearing by heaven and earth was not binding, or if you swore by Jerusalem, but if you swore toward Jerusalem that was binding. There is an entire Mishnaic tract given to this subject. Jesus is going to make clear how all of this connects to the Kingdom of God.

1. What new standard of right and wrong is Jesus bringing to the people?

2. How does Jesus connect the old teaching with this new one?

Heaven & Earth?

Jerusalem?

Your own head?

3. What are the promises/vows made in a traditional wedding ceremony?

4. What does Jesus mean when He says let your “yes” be a “yes” and “no” be a “no”?

5. What do you see as the main concern in this section?

Read Matthew 5:38-42 (RETALIATION)

The Old Testament prescription *Lex Talionis* or the “Law of Revenge” (Ex 21:24; Lev 24:19-20; Dt 19:21) was not given to foster vengeance; the law explicitly forbade that (Lev 19:18). Rather, it was given, as the OT context shows, to provide the nation’s judicial system with a ready formula for punishment, not least because it would decisively terminate vendettas. There is a personal aspect to this teaching and a judicial aspect to this teaching. Not like the OT laws permitting divorce because of the hardness of men’s hearts (Matthew 19:3-12), the *lex talionis* was instituted to curb evil because of the hardness of men’s hearts.

John Piper said, “God gives by concession a legal regulation as a dam against the river of violence which flows from man’s evil heart.”

HOWEVER lets read Jeremiah 31:31-34, 32:37-41

Jesus’ instruction is grounded in eschatology, as the fulfillment of a new age, and the prophecies that curbed evil are now superseded by this new age that Jesus is ushering in.

Example #1: Pain/Damage/Insult

Example #2: Theft of Legal Property

Example #3: Oppression of Unjust government

Example: #4 Generous Spirit

How would you naturally react if any of these would happen to you?

What internal change must happen for you to react in a Kingdom way?

Read Matthew 5:43-48 (LOVE YOUR ENEMIES)

1. What is the motivation that Jesus gives for loving our enemies?

2. Who would you consider to be your enemy? (against them/don't agree with them/against you)

3. In verse 46, Jesus speaks to a very challenging truth. How would you rewrite this verse in your own words but keeping the truth of the statement the same?

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

1. How were we made perfect?

2. What change will this bring to the way we treat others?

Part 4

Matthew 6:1-17

In this section Jesus is speaking to the reality of religious hypocrisy. A hypocrite preaches one thing, and does another. The word hypocrite is rooted in the Greek word hypokrites, which means “stage actor, pretender, dissembler.” So think of a hypocrite as a person who pretends to be a certain way, but really acts and believes the total opposite. Here Jesus is really dealing with the motives behind a person’s “right living.” Is the motivation internally focused or externally focused?

Three Chief Acts of Jewish Piety:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

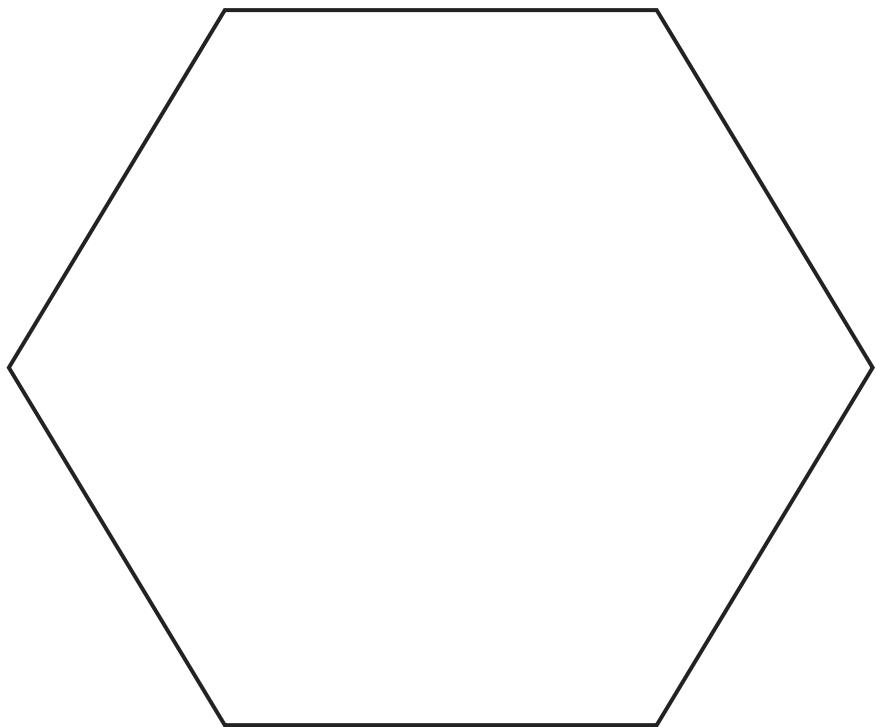
Structure of each section:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

LORD’S PRAYER

Verses 7-13 deals with a teaching of prayer that is often misunderstood by believers. The word for “babble” comes from an Aramaic word meaning “useless or idle”. This kind of prayer is very pagan because gods of this day allegedly thrived on the incantation and repetition of the person.

The prayer that Jesus gave His disciples is a model of *how* to pray and not necessarily *what* to pray. Prayer is the cornerstone to being an effective disciple. We make ourselves available to be taught and changed by God every time we pray. Life is a process of learning to “walk with God” and this is what prayer is.



P _____
R _____
A _____
Y _____

Part 5

Matthew 6:19-34

In this section Jesus speaks to the reality that to be His disciple will require complete devotion from the one who desires to follow. Attempts at divided loyalty betray not just a partial commitment but also a deep-seated commitment to idolatry in many forms. The language of Jesus, in this section, shows that there are really only two ways to live your life. You can either live for the world and the values of the world or for the Kingdom of God and the values of the Kingdom of God...there is no middle ground.

Verses 19-21

1. What are some examples of Treasures of Earth?

2. What are some examples of Treasures in Heaven?

3. What do the following scripture passages say about money/wealth?
 - a. 1 Timothy 6:10

 - b. 1 Timothy 5:8

 - c. Proverbs 6:6-8

 - d. 1 Timothy 4:3-4 & 6:17

So in your own words, what do you see as the point Jesus is making towards wealth?

Verses 22-24

1. What is the link between treasure & heart?
2. Heart & Eye?
3. Eye & Body?
4. Master & Money?
5. How does your choice of treasure, master, and sight affect your attitude toward life?

Verses 25-34

Notice in all these examples how Jesus is pointing His disciples from the lesser to the greater. It is not a license for carelessness, apathy, indifference or laziness BUT it is a message of trust, faith and pursuit.

1. What is Jesus' main point in Verse 25?
2. What do we learn from the 3 examples Jesus gives (Birds, Flowers, Pagans)?

3. In verse 33 Jesus says that we should seek first the Kingdom of God...what does that look like in everyday life?

4. How does verse 33 connect with what Jesus just taught His disciples to pray for in the Lord's Prayer?

5. Personally what causes you the most worry?

6. What are signs in your life that you are worrying too much?

7. What do you do to counteract anxiety in order to concentrate on the kingdom?

Part 6

Matthew 7:1-11

The first five verses of this section teach to the danger of being judgmental and practicing hypocrisy towards others.

Verse 1-5

1. Is Jesus saying that all forms of judgment are wrong and should be avoided?

2. What kind of judgment is being described in these verses?

3. How is this judgement different than discernment, wisdom, or seeing something for the way it is?

4. Describe a time in your life that you confronted a judgmental attitude/person? How did it make you feel?

5. Describe a time in your life that you had a judgmental or hypocritical attitude?

6. What is an example of negative judgment?

7. What is an example of discerning judgment?

8. In this section are we called to take the speck out of a brothers/sister's eye? Only after we have done what?

Verse 6

SACRED=

PIGS=

DOGS=

Verses 7-11

Here Jesus teaches what the source and power is that will help us discern between a hypocritical, judgmental attitude, and a naïve and undiscerning attitude.

1. What is Jesus stressing about God in these verses?

2. How is this teaching to encourage his disciples? What is it intended to motivate his disciples to do A LOT of?

Bread/Stone

Fish/Snake

3. What is Jesus teaching about the nature of prayer here and what is at the heart of prayer?

Part 7

Matthew 7:12-20

Verse twelve is often described as “The Golden Rule.”

1. How does the righteousness (right lived life) described in this verse differ than that of the Pharisees?

2. What is the connection between verse 12 and verses 1-5?

3. How does this living fight back against hypocrisy?

Let's look at Matthew 25:31-46...

1. How is verse 12 lived out in this parable of Jesus?

2. How can this one “simple” statement help us decide a thousand moral issues that arise?

In Verses 13-27, the Sermon on the Mount ends with four warnings, each offering paired contrasts: Two Ways, Two Trees, Two Claims, and Two Builders. The key purpose of these sections is to show the critical nature of listening and responding to the words and teachings of Jesus.

Verses 13-14 “Two-Ways”

1. Is this a gate leading to a road or a road leading to a gate? What is the significance of the way you read it?

Narrow Gate=

Wide Gate=

Narrow Road=

Wide Road=

2. Describe the two different types of people described in this section.
3. Describe the two different destinations described in this section and how a person goes about getting there.
4. Our culture holds to a popular belief that all roads lead to the divine. All religions are going to the same place but they are heading there just in different ways. How would Jesus respond to this statement?
5. How do you know what road you are on?

Verses 15-20 “Two-Trees”

1. Is claiming someone a “false prophet” by the fruit of their lives going against Jesus claim not to judge (verses 1-5)?

2. How are we to distinguish a sheep from a wolf in sheep's clothing?
3. **Based on verses 12-14** what should their teaching be founded on and be leading its listeners towards?

FRUIT=

Read Galatians 5:16-26

1. What are fruits of the flesh/world?
2. What are fruits of the Spirit?
3. What are the marks of a wolf in sheep's clothing (false teacher)?
(1 Timothy 6:3-5)
4. How do we go about evaluating a life based on the fruit of the life without stumbling into a “works righteousness” mentality where we start believing we are saved by what we do?

Let's look at John 15 to get the complete answer to this...

1. What is the power/source/means to growing good fruit in your life?
 2. What is the focus of such a life?
 3. What is God actively trying to get more of our life?

Part 8

Matthew 7:21-29

Read Verses 21-23

1. What is the fault of those who were eventually banished as “evildoers”?

2. How could someone prophesy in the name of Jesus, cast out demons in His name, and do many mighty works in His name and have this kind of response from Jesus?

This section of Jesus' teaching has caused many Christians to doubt their own salvation. This is a perfect place to allow scripture to interpret scripture.

1. How is a person saved....
Romans 3:21-26

Galatians 4:4-7

Ephesians 2:8-10

2. What is the “Will of the Father”? (**John 6:40**)

3. What is the role of “right living” in the life of a Christian? What is the motivation of this kind of life...to earn entry into the Kingdom of God or because you are part of the Kingdom of God?

4. Who do you feel Jesus speaking to in these verses? (Pharisee's, false prophets or lukewarm/struggling Christians)

Read Verses 24-27 “Two-Builders”

1. Who is the “wise-person” and what do they do?
2. Who is the “foolish-person” and what do they do?
3. How is the quality/strength of their foundation finally realized?
4. How do the similarities and differences between the two house builders reflect the people who heard Jesus?
5. What kind of commitment is Jesus calling for here? What is the alternative?
6. Considering the sermon as a whole how would you describe the foundation of your life? What do you rely on most when rains, storms, trials, struggles, and hardships arise, and what emotions and attitudes arise out of you when these things happen? What does this reveal about the foundation of your life?

7. What would you need to tear down in order to shore up that foundation? How do you need others to help you in that process?

8. At this point in your life, is your pressing need to learn more about the teachings of Jesus or to put those teachings into practice?

9. How is the foundation of Jesus & His teachings compare/contrast to the foundations that this world offers?