

# **Bible Study July 16, 2025**

## **MATTHEW 5 (ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)**

### **Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount**

***<sup>1</sup> Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.***

Enormous crowds were following Jesus—he was the talk of the town, and everyone wanted to see and hear him. The disciples, who were the closest associates of this popular man, were certainly tempted to feel important, proud, and possessive. Being with Jesus gave them not only prestige but also opportunity for receiving money and power.

The crowds were gathering once again. But before speaking to them, Jesus pulled his disciples aside and warned them about the temptations they would face as his associates. He defined his new Kingdom community. Don't seek or expect fame and fortune, Jesus was saying, and don't be surprised by mourning, hunger, and persecution. Jesus' teachings were radically different than the teachings coming from most leaders in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, Jesus assured his disciples that God would reward them, though perhaps not in this life. There may be times when following Jesus will bring us great popularity, but also expect ridicule, scorn, and even persecution because the Good News of Jesus can be offensive to people in this world. If we don't live by Jesus' words in this sermon, we will find ourselves using God's message only to promote our personal interests.

### **The Beatitudes**

***<sup>2</sup> And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:***

***<sup>3</sup> “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

***<sup>4</sup> “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.***

***<sup>5</sup> “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.***

Jesus began his sermon with words that seem to contradict each other. But God's way of living usually contradicts the world's. Jesus' life certainly contradicted the status quo and normal way of living in the first century. If you want to live for God, you must be ready to say and do what seems strange to the world, what other people may not understand or accept. You must be willing to give when others take, to love when others hate, to help when others abuse. By setting aside your own rights in order to serve others, you will one day receive everything God has in store for you.

***<sup>6</sup> “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.***

***<sup>7</sup> “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.***

***<sup>8</sup> “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.***

***<sup>9</sup> “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.***

**<sup>10</sup> “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**<sup>11</sup> “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

This section of Jesus' teaching is often referred to as the Beatitudes. These verses can be understood in at least four ways: (1) They are a code of ethics and a standard of conduct for all believers. (2) They contrast Kingdom values (what is eternal) with worldly values (what is temporary). (3) They contrast the superficial “faith” of the Pharisees with the real faith that Jesus demands. (4) They show how Old Testament expectations will be fulfilled in the new Kingdom. The Beatitudes are not multiple choice, as if you could pick what you like and leave the rest. They must be taken as a whole. Jesus perfectly exemplified them, and we must aim to live as he did.

Each beatitude tells how to be blessed by God. Being blessed means more than being happy. It describes the fortunate or privileged position of those who belong to God's Kingdom. The Beatitudes don't promise pleasure or earthly prosperity. Being blessed by God means experiencing hope and joy, independent of the outward circumstances. To open the door to such hope and joy, which leads to the deepest form of happiness, we must walk across the threshold of suffering, sacrifice, and transformation.

With Jesus' announcement that the Kingdom was near (4:17), people were naturally asking, “How do I qualify to be in God's Kingdom?” Jesus said that God's Kingdom is organized differently from worldly kingdoms. In the Kingdom of Heaven, wealth and power and authority are unimportant. The first and primary quality needed is humility, recognizing your need for God. Kingdom people seek different blessings and benefits than people of the world, and they also have different attitudes. Do your attitudes reflect the humility and self-sacrifice of Jesus, your king?

Jesus said to be happy when we're persecuted for our faith. Persecution can be good because it (1) takes our eyes off earthly rewards, (2) strips away superficial belief, (3) strengthens our faith if we endure, and (4) serves as an example to others who follow as they see the way we live while going through it. We can be comforted knowing that God's greatest prophets were persecuted (including Elijah, Jeremiah, and Daniel). The fact that Christians in many times and places around the world have been persecuted is evidence of faithfulness; faithless people would be unnoticed. In the future God will reward the faithful by receiving them into his eternal Kingdom, where no one will face persecution.

## **Salt and Light**

**<sup>13</sup> “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.**

If a seasoning has no flavor, it has no value. If Christians make no effort to affect the world around them, they are of little value in representing God's presence in this world. If we are too much like the world, we won't be able to help or change it; as seasoning, we will be worthless. Christians should not blend in with everyone else. If we isolate ourselves from non-Christians, however, we

will lose the ability to reach them. Instead, we should influence others positively, just as seasoning brings out the best flavor in food.

***<sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Neither do <sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.***

Can you hide a city that is sitting on top of a hill? Its light at night can be seen for miles. If we live for Jesus, we will glow like lights, shining brightly with his love. Many who are living in spiritual darkness will be attracted by our light and want to step into it. Jesus’ light always reveals truth. We hide our light by (1) being quiet when we should speak, (2) going along with the crowd, (3) denying God’s truth, (4) letting sin dim our light, (5) not explaining our light to others, or (6) ignoring the needs of others. Be a beacon of truth—don’t shut your light off from the rest of the world.

### **Christ Came to Fulfill the Law**

***<sup>17</sup> “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.***

God gave his moral and ceremonial laws to help people love him with all their hearts and minds and to love others. Throughout Israel’s history, however, these laws had often been misquoted and misapplied. By Jesus’ time, religious leaders had turned the laws into a confusing mass of rules that only burdened people. When Jesus talked about a new way to understand God’s law, he was actually trying to bring people back to its original purpose. Jesus did not speak against the law itself but against the abuses and excesses to which it had been subjected (see John 1:17).

***<sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.***

Some of the people in the crowd were experts at telling others what to do, but they missed the central point of God’s law. Jesus made it clear that obeying God’s law means more than just explaining it. Studying God’s law and telling others to obey it is much easier than putting it into practice. How are you doing at obeying God yourself?

***<sup>20</sup> For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.***

If Jesus did not come to abolish the law, does that mean all the Old Testament laws still apply to us today? In the Old Testament, there were three categories of law: ceremonial, civil, and moral.

(1) The ceremonial law related specifically to Israel’s worship (see Leviticus 1:2-3, for example). Its primary purpose was to point forward to Jesus Christ; these laws, therefore, were no longer necessary after Jesus’ death and resurrection. While we are no longer bound by ceremonial law,

the principles behind them—to worship and love the holy God—still apply. The Pharisees often accused Jesus of violating ceremonial law.

(2) The civil law applied to daily living in Israel (see Deuteronomy 24:10-11, for example). Because modern society and culture are so radically different from that time and setting, all of these guidelines cannot be followed specifically. But the principles behind the commands are timeless and should guide our conduct. Jesus demonstrated these principles by example.

(3) The moral law (such as the Ten Commandments) is the direct command of God, and it requires strict obedience (see Exodus 20:13, for example). The moral law reveals God's nature and will for how we should relate to him and to other people, and it still applies today. Jesus obeyed the moral law completely.

Righteousness means having a right love for God leading to a right relationship with him and others, producing right actions. The Pharisees were exacting and scrupulous in their attempts to follow their laws. They thought that was what they needed to do to please God. So how could Jesus reasonably call us to greater righteousness than theirs? The Pharisees' weakness was that they were content to obey the laws outwardly without allowing God to change their hearts (or attitudes). They looked good and acted piously, but they were far from the Kingdom of Heaven. God is concerned about our hearts as well as our deeds, because our hearts show where our real allegiance lies.

Jesus was saying that his listeners needed a different kind of righteousness altogether (out of love for God), not just a more intense version of the Pharisees' obedience (which was mere legal compliance). Our righteousness must (1) come from what God does in us, not what we can do by ourselves; (2) be God-centered, not self-centered; (3) be based on reverence for God, not approval from people; and (4) go beyond keeping the law to living by the principles behind the law. We should be just as concerned about our attitudes that people don't see as about our actions that are seen by all.

## **Murder**

***21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.***

When Jesus said, "But I say," he was not doing away with the law or adding his own beliefs. He was revealing God's truth, giving a fuller understanding of why God made a certain law in the first place. Jesus, not the Pharisees, knew what the Old Testament really meant. For example, Moses said, "You must not murder" (Exodus 20:13); Jesus taught that we should not even become angry enough to murder, for then we have already committed murder in our hearts. The Pharisees read this law and, not having literally murdered anyone, felt that they had obeyed it. Yet they were angry enough with Jesus that they would soon plot his death, though they would not do the dirty work themselves. We miss the intent of God's Word when we read his rules for living without trying to understand why he made them. Far more than getting us to keep dos and don'ts, God wants to transform our hearts.

Killing is a terrible sin, but much of our anger is a great sin, too, because it also ignores God's command to love. Anger in this case refers to a seething, brooding bitterness against someone. It is a dangerous emotion that always threatens to leap out of control, leading to violence, emotional hurt, increased mental stress, and spiritual damage. Anger keeps us from developing a spirit that pleases God. Have you ever been proud that you didn't strike out and say what was really on your mind? Self-control is good, but Jesus wants us to practice control of our thoughts as well. Jesus said that we will be held accountable even for our thoughts and attitudes.

## Anger

***<sup>23</sup> So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.***

Broken relationships can hinder a person's relationship with God. If we have a problem or grievance with a friend, we should resolve the problem as soon as possible. If we have offended someone, our worship is hindered—we worship halfheartedly if we do so knowing we have offended another person. Our attitudes toward others reflect our attitudes about our relationship with God (1 John 4:20).

***<sup>25</sup> Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. <sup>26</sup> Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.***

In Jesus' day, someone who couldn't pay a debt would be thrown into prison until the debt was paid. Unless someone came to pay the debt for the prisoner, he or she would probably die there. It is practical advice to resolve our differences with our adversaries before their anger causes more trouble (Proverbs 25:8-10). You may never get into a disagreement that takes you to court, but even small conflicts mend more easily when you try to make peace right away. In a broader sense, these verses advise us to get our words and actions right with our brothers and sisters before we have to stand before God.

## Lust

***<sup>27</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ <sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.***

The Old Testament law declares that it is wrong for a person to have sex with someone other than his or her spouse (Exodus 20:14). This commandment was given to protect the essential God-given value of men and women and to guard the whole family from destructive forces. Here Jesus said that even a lustful desire to have sex with someone other than your spouse violates the integrity of your relationships with your spouse and the other person, and thus is sin. Jesus emphasized that if the act is wrong, then so is the intention. To be faithful to your spouse with your body but not your mind is to break the trust so vital to a strong marriage. Abstaining from extramarital sex solves half the problem; Jesus wants our hearts and minds transformed as well so that our thoughts have integrity in concert with our actions. Jesus is not condemning natural

interest in the opposite sex or even healthy sexual desire, but he does warn against the deliberate, repeated filling of one's mind with fantasies that would be sinful and harmful to others if acted out.

Some think that if lustful thoughts are sinful, why not go ahead and carry out the lustful actions, too? Acting out sinful desires is harmful in several ways: (1) It causes people to excuse sin rather than to stop sinning; (2) it destroys marriages and families; (3) it is deliberate rebellion against God's Word; and (4) it always hurts someone else in addition to the sinner. Sinful actions are more dangerous than sinful desires, and that is why desires should not be acted out. Jesus wants us to guard our hearts and minds and to have proper attitudes toward the opposite sex. If you are consumed by selfish desire for someone who is not your spouse, you may need to seek help. Ask God to guard your heart and mind and help you to see that person also as his beloved child.

***<sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.***

When Jesus said to get rid of your hand or your eye, he was speaking figuratively. He didn't mean literally to gouge out your eye, because even a blind person can lust. But if that were the only choice, it would be better to go into heaven with one eye or hand than to go to hell with two. We sometimes tolerate sins in our lives that, left unchecked, could eventually destroy us. Experiencing the pain of removal (getting rid of a bad habit or something we treasure, for instance) is better than allowing the sin to bring judgment and condemnation. Examine your life for anything that causes you to sin, and take every necessary action to remove it.

## **Divorce**

***<sup>31</sup> "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'  
<sup>32</sup> But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.***

Divorce is as hurtful and destructive today as it was in Jesus' day. God intends marriage to be a lifetime commitment (Genesis 2:24). When entering into marriage, people should never consider divorce an option for solving problems or a way out of a relationship that seems dead. In these verses, Jesus is also attacking those who purposefully abuse the marriage covenant, using divorce to satisfy their lustful desire to marry someone else. Are your actions today helping your marriage grow stronger, or are you tearing it apart?

Jesus said that divorce is not permissible except for in cases of unfaithfulness. This does not mean that divorce should automatically occur when a spouse commits adultery. The word translated "unfaithful" implies a sexually immoral lifestyle, not a confessed and repented act of adultery. Those who discover that their spouse has been unfaithful should first make every effort to forgive them and reconcile and restore the relationship. We are always to look for reasons to restore the marriage relationship rather than excuses to leave it.

## **Oaths**

**<sup>33</sup> “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ <sup>34</sup> But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, <sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup> And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup> Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.**

Here Jesus was emphasizing the importance of plainly telling the truth. People were breaking vows and using sacred language casually and carelessly. Keeping vows and promises is important; it builds trust and makes committed human relationships possible. The Bible condemns making vows or taking oaths casually, giving your word while knowing that you might not keep it, and swearing falsely in God’s name (Exodus 20:7; Leviticus 19:12; Numbers 30:1-2; Deuteronomy 19:16-20). Vows are needed in certain situations only because we live in a sinful society that breeds distrust.

Vows were common, but Jesus told his followers not to use them—their word alone should be enough (see James 5:12). Are you known as a person of your word? Truthfulness seems so rare that we sometimes feel we must end our statements with “I promise.” If we tell the truth all the time, we will have less pressure to back up our words with an oath or promise.

## **Retaliation**

**<sup>38</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’**

God’s purpose behind this law regarding fair punishment was an expression of mercy. The law was given to judges and said, in effect, “Make the punishment fit the crime” (see Exodus 21:23-25; Leviticus 24:19-20; Deuteronomy 19:21). It was not a guide for personal revenge. These laws were given to limit vengeance and help the court administer punishment that was neither too strict nor too lenient. Some people, however, were using this phrase to justify their vendettas against others. People still try to excuse their acts of revenge by reasoning, I was just doing to them what they did to me.

**<sup>39</sup> But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. <sup>40</sup> And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. <sup>41</sup> And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. <sup>42</sup> Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.**

When we are wronged, often our first reaction is to get even. Instead, Jesus said we should do good to those who wrong us! Our desire should not be to keep score but to love and forgive. This reverses our natural inclination and requires supernatural help. Only God can give us the strength to love as he does. Instead of planning to get even, pray for those who hurt you.

## **Love for Enemies**

**<sup>43</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’**

**<sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,**

These statements were offensive to the Jews of Jesus' day. Any Messiah who would turn the other cheek was not the military leader they wanted to lead a revolt against Rome. Because they were under Roman oppression, they wanted retaliation against their enemies, whom they hated. But Jesus suggested a new, radical response to injustice: Instead of demanding rights, give them up freely! According to Jesus, showing justice and mercy to others accomplishes more than demanding it for yourself.

By telling us not to retaliate, Jesus is keeping us from taking the law into our own hands. By loving and praying for our enemies, we can overcome evil with good. We need God's supernatural help to love people who commit cruel and evil acts.

The Pharisees interpreted Leviticus 19:18 as teaching that they should love only those who love in return, and Psalms 139:19-22 and 140:9-11 as meaning that they should hate their enemies. But Jesus says we are to love our enemies. If you act in love for your enemies, treating them well, you will show that Jesus truly rules your life. This becomes possible when we give ourselves fully to Jesus as Lord, because then he can deliver us from our natural self-centeredness. We must trust the Holy Spirit to help us show love to those for whom we may not feel love (Romans 5:5).

***<sup>45</sup> so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. <sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? <sup>48</sup> You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.***

Matthew 5–7 is called the Sermon on the Mount because Jesus gave it on a hillside near Capernaum. This “sermon” probably covered several days of preaching. In it, Jesus taught people what God's Kingdom is meant to be. Position, authority, and money are not important in his Kingdom—what matters is faithful obedience to God from the heart, which leads to genuine love for God and others and transforms lives, communities, and nations. The Sermon on the Mount challenged the proud and legalistic religious leaders of the day. It called them back to the messages of the Old Testament prophets, who, like Jesus, taught that heartfelt devotion to God and loving service to others matter more than religious observance.

How can we be perfect? (1) In character: In this life we cannot be flawless, but we can be complete in God and aspire to be as much like Jesus as possible. (2) In holiness: Like the Pharisees, we are to separate ourselves from the world's sinful values. But unlike the Pharisees, we are to be devoted to God's desires rather than our own and carry his love and mercy into the world. (3) In maturity: We can't achieve Christlike character and holy living all at once, but we must grow toward maturity and wholeness (Philippians 3:12-16). Just as we expect different behavior from a baby, a child, a teenager, and an adult, God expects different behavior from each of us, depending on our respective stages of spiritual development. (4) In love: We can seek to love others as completely as God loves us. His love gives us the ability to pass it on.

We can be complete in God yet have much room to grow. Our shortcomings must never deter us from striving to be more like Jesus. He wants all his disciples to rise above mediocrity and to mature in every area, becoming more and more like him. Those who strive to become perfect will one day be perfect, even as Christ is perfect (1 John 3:2-3).