

**SERMON
ON THE
MOUNT:
REAL
CHRISTIAN
LIVING**

A Fall Sermon Series by Ryan Stratton

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Matthew 5:1-16 NIV

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them. He said:

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. 14 “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Upside Down Blessings

If you could describe your perfect world, what would it be like? What would you have in it? How would you want other people to act/ behave? Would you want other people there? Would there be a set standard for how to live? Would others agree to what you have in mind?

One of the challenges we face is that we often have ideas and visions that, in reality, won't work for our lives or for the world. There is a song in the movie "The Greatest Showman" where young PT Barnum journeys from childhood to adulthood, learning what it means to live and trying to get a "better" station in life. The song is called "A Million Dreams" and he is constantly talking about colors and building a life for themselves.

Building a life for yourself is not, in and of itself, a bad thing. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, shows what it means to have the kind of life that is fit for the kingdom of Heaven. What he does is actually take the Old Testament laws and codes and go to a deeper level. This isn't a dream he has, but a reality for what following him means and what the implications are for all areas of our lives.

One of the challenges facing the church in the 21st century and beyond is how to "repackage" the Christian faith, so it better resembles the Early Church and the faith Jesus taught. Most teenagers and young adults today are a mirror of the faith of their parents. Imagine how the early listeners to Jesus felt when he told them the message given in the Sermon on the Mount. How many would have looked at Jesus and thought or said, "That's not what my parents and grandparents taught me." This is why the Sermon on the Mount is so important to study. It is giving a deeper understanding of the 10 Commandments and the Torah for people to live by. The Sermon on the Mount, when taken the time to study, reveals the true nature of the heart of humanity and teaches how Jesus says we are to live as his followers. John Wesley, the founder of

Methodism, called this the *moral law* because this is really a standard of life for non-belivers.

We love to receive information and try to figure out what we can do and achieve. The Sermon on the Mount is different. This, as with everything Jesus says, cannot be taken out of context or cherry-picked based upon what we like or don't like, find easy, or find hard. It is time to be like the early church and live out our faith, our spirituality.

As we begin this series on the Sermon on the Mount and seeking what the Real Christian life looks like, we have to understand what our guiding principles are. In other words, what do we give authority to base our lives on?

AUTHORITY

The Gospel of Matthew is all about giving the authority of Heaven and placing it all on Jesus. Matthew is concerned with the kingdom of God throughout. How does he do this?

Matthew is said to be the most Jewish out of all the Gospel writers. This is because Matthew uses many Old Testaments passages to show the foreshadowing of Jesus. He is showing how Jesus has, and is, the authority to do what he does and says what he says.

So, as we begin this journey through these three chapters in Matthew, the first thing we have to ask and settle is, "Is Jesus the authority for your life?" meaning do Jesus have the final word for everything in your life?

This is where we begin because this is where this passage begins. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, the author is comparing Jesus to Moses as the One who has come to save and deliver his people. What's interesting is Luke has this sermon recorded on "the plain" (Luke 6:17-49) and Matthew has the location on the mountain. The point of the location is not what we may think. Matthew is not trying to say exactly where the

location was, but he was making a point. Just as Moses ascended the mountain to get the law from God and brought it down, Jesus goes up the mountain to deliver God's law and word to the people.

The question about his authority in your life comes into play here and now. When Jesus goes *up* the mountain—a higher teaching—he sits down. Sitting down is the position of a lawgiver. Scott McKnight says, “As those with legal author sat down in the seat of Moses, so Jesus ‘sat down’ to teach.” What we have here is a record of what Jesus thought the church (people of God) should look and be in the world.

The Sermon on the Mount is found in Matthew chapters 5-7. These chapters are talked about, even by non-Christians, and preached about a lot in Christian churches. Augustine said the Sermon on the Mount was “the perfect standard of the Christian life.” In essence, we are studying what it means to live like we are already in the Kingdom of Heaven.

So, what does it look like to live in the kingdom of God?

KINGDOM GRACE

The first thing we see is Jesus names types of people that we would not expect to know the kingdom of God or be given the chance to be “first in line” to receive the blessings of heaven. This is because we can easily think we deserve his grace more than anyone else. This passage is one of the many that show how Jesus is turning his followers worldview upside down.

One of the things John Wesley pointed out in his second sermon on the Sermon on the Mount is this is really all about grace. It's all about grace because what we see in the Beatitudes are different types of people that would not receive grace in the world.

But this grace that transforms what the world sees as valuable. How so? Jesus says these people will receive the kingdom of Heaven and will receive what their “lacking” in this life.

The poor in spirit – these people know their sin and have repented yet are convinced they have no spiritual good in them.

Those who mourn – these are the people who are in sorrow on the account of some worldly trouble or disappointment like loss of status, friends, job, etc.

The meek – these are the ones who can truly discern what is evil and also suffer from evil. Their passion is always toward the Lord but it is always guided by knowledge and tempered in their thoughts, words, and deeds. They are sensible.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness – Know that hunger and thirst are some of the strongest of bodily desires. This is a strong desire to know God and follow him.

The merciful – These are the compassionate, the tender-hearted. Love guides their actions and life.

The pure in heart – These people have had their hearts purified by God.

The peacemakers – These are the people who love God and detest all contention, debate, conflict. They do the good because of the love of God within in them.

Those who are persecuted – These people are persecuted for righteousness sake because they are righteous, they have been born again.

Those who are insulted and have evil things falsely said about them – These are the people who are full of the love of God and yet other people will try to spread lies about them to ruin to try and ruin their reputation.

This is a long list of the types of people who Jesus considers “blessed” in the kingdom of God. This would not be a list the rest of the world considers blessed because these kinds of people are humble and do not try to be anything except who God says.

Now, we always read this as “blessed” but the Greek word (*Makarioi*) can also be translated as “happy.” Know this. This is not the same way we think of “happiness” today. This is NOT an emotional feeling, this is deep down joy and gratitude that is given by God. So, to be truly happy/blessed, we have to take the gifts as they are given to us and receive them, by faith. But we cannot keep this faith to ourselves.

BLESSINGS LEAD TO RESPONSIBILITY

Living into the blessings of God means that we have this light shining in and through us. We can taste the incredible goodness of the kingdom of Heaven. Because this light is shining so bright through us it is just about impossible to hide our faith. This is why Christianity is not an individual faith—because our lives have an impact on the lives of those around us.

Yes, there is a dimension of personal holiness because Jesus does have to be real to us and we have to be transformed into the likeness and image of Jesus Christ. But this personal holiness leads to social holiness. I bet some of you are asking what is *social holiness*? Good question!

Social holiness is when we live our faith, unashamed, out in the world. We know that everything we do has an impact. We know that when we live out our faith we are seeking to right the wrongs and work with God where he is working, using the gifts and talents he has given us.

This is where we get to work with God to create the world of our dreams and God works through us to create the world of his dreams. Country music artist Garth Brooks has a song from the early 1990s called “We Shall Be Free.” In this song he gives the dreams of his heart for the world. If the people of God live out their faith out in the open, no matter if any persecution, insults, or anything else comes their way, then we can all work toward the kind of world and life God is creating in and through us.

“When the last child cries for a crust of bread.

When the last man dies for the words that he says.

When there’s shelter over the poorest head...

When the last thing we notice is the color of skin and the first thing we look for is the beauty within...”

The light of the world is shining through you. Seek God’s blessings by asking him to purify your heart. Live out your faith in such a way everyone knows there’s something different about you. Then, the world “may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16 NIV)

Receive God’s grace and allow his blessings to flow in and through your life.

Let’s pray...

Gracious God, Thank you for the gift of knowing you. Thank you for the grace we receive to live this life and share this life with others. Guide us to seek first your kingdom and help us to work with you to transform this world to resemble your kingdom. May we, with every step/word/action/thought show those around us your kingdom glory by the good works you give us to do. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Matthew 5:43-48 NIV

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

It's All About Relationships

One of the challenges with the Sermon on the Mount is it seems as if we are giving a whole bunch of WHAT TO DOs. It doesn't seem very spiritual, on the surface. But this is where many people, including well-meaning Christians and followers of Christ like to be—on the surface. Why?

This particular teaching of Jesus cuts straight at our way of life. We end up taking what we like, and applying it to our lives. We throw out the stuff that we don't like because, let's face it, it makes us uncomfortable and says we are the ones to have to change...and we all know the only ones who like to be changed are babies with a dirty diaper.

But see, Jesus is talking about so much more than WHAT TO DO. He is focusing on WHY. What do I mean by this? Glad you asked! 😊 Take time to read through all three chapters of this sermon (Matthew 5-7) and see how many times Jesus says, "you have heard it said...but I tell you..." This is key.

Jesus is giving teaching, on such a deep and profound level that the only way to argue against it is to blatantly say it is "wrong" without giving any valid explanation. But if we pay attention, we can see and understand that this is about the Kingdom of God, not us individually. We cannot make this all about ourselves. We have to see that this Sermon is ALL about relationships.

Now, I bet if I looked at you right now and said we are broken by sin, you would either nod your head, or say YES! But do you know what is broken? Everyone is broken. We all are. Even professing believers in Christ are still broken because of the sin *nature* that is still in us. Because of Christ we can experience forgiveness from our current *and* past sins. But we still have a nature that is corrupted and marred by sin.

This means that what is broken is in our relationships. Sin is so much more than just the actions we do. Sin has corrupted our entire being. Repentance is crucial.

Since sin has affected our relationships, we have to understand there are four relationships that God will need to *fix* and *redeem* and *reconcile* within us—our relationship with God, ourselves, others, creation.

There are so many *self-help* resources on the market that we can think we can take care of ourselves. It seems like we can fix ourselves with “3 easy steps”, or “all you need to know is...” But looking at this teaching of Jesus we should be able to see that this is an impossible way of life.

Impossible. Then why should we even try? Because it’s not about what we can or can’t do on our own. It’s all about the Kingdom of God (the rule of God in the world). If we get this straight, then we can better understand it is God who is working to set things right.

Think about it. If our relationship with God is right then our relationship with ourselves is right. If our relationship with ourselves is right we will be right with others and we will not have any conflict. If all of this is right then we will be right with creation, which means creation won’t be in turmoil and we *all* can live in peace. Now, that would be a pretty cool world.

Last week we talked about the Beatitudes and how they give an example of the upside down blessings God gives to those who suffer or are lowly in the world. We like to say things like “God helps those who help themselves” but this is not Biblical...and it is flat out wrong. Look at what Jesus talks about in the rest of chapter 5 (verses 17-48).

Jesus is the fulfillment of the law – basically Jesus is the end all be all of the Law (Old Testament and Prophets). Notice he says he is *not* taking

away *any* of the Law. He is, instead, giving a deeper meaning to the Law and Prophets.

Then he goes on to talk about how, even if, you have anger in your heart that is the same as murdering someone. Why? Because you have killed the relationship. Anger leads us to do things we know are wrong but we do them anyway because we allow darkness to cloud our judgement.

Remember that anger is a secondary emotion, meaning, we do not get angry right away. Anger comes from some sort of hurt and we end up lashing out in the form of revenge.

Also keep in mind that we are not really angry with who/what we think we are. Often times we are angry with ourselves but we don't want to admit it because our pride gets in the way.

Then Jesus teaches about adultery. I'm sure you can figure out why Jesus would talk about this. What he is doing is showing that actions we do matter, and impact another person. The truth is our actions, even done in "privacy" impact the entire community.

This is a betrayal of trust. But it's much deeper than we may think. Adultery is actually a betrayal of the covenant with God. The reality is, Joseph, in Genesis, got it right. He knew that any sin was really against God.

Then Jesus talks about divorce. Let's clear this up. Jesus is talking about frivolous divorces. He is not talking about *just/right reasons* divorces. I can hear it now, people will say their reason was right. Well, think long and hard.

If you notice why things are the way they are today, it is because we too easily give up and don't really do the work it takes. Not only that, we end up blaming others. Not only that, we seek after our own

passions/desires. This may hit hard, but Jesus is talking about making sure we follow through, whole-heartedly, with our commitments.

That's why he talks about *oaths* next. He is saying how important it is to do what you say you will do. Be a person of your word. Otherwise, we are living out our life as the evil one says to live.

We are not to take an eye for an eye. This means we are not to seek our own revenge. We like it when people "get what's coming to them;" but God is the one who will pay back the evil done.

Then, Jesus has the guts to share the truth that we are to love our enemies. He will say later on that we are to go the extra mile for them.

Why all of this? Because verse 48 sums it up...we are to be *perfect*. This means we are to be *complete, fully-mature* in our love. We can only be like this if our relationship with God is set right.

- We need to repent (change our hearts and lives) and realign our life with God.
- Then we need to be right with ourselves. We will all mess up. Know this, our actions do not make us bad people, it only means we did what we weren't supposed to. This is important so we understand we are who God says we are.
- Then we have to get right with those around us. It is not an us vs. them. We are all in this together. Too bad some people don't remember this daily. The only way we can get through this life is by the grace of God poured out on us to have a right/realigned relationship with him, with ourselves, with others.
- When all of that is put into place, our relationship with creation (the world) will become right.

See, the Sermon on the Mount is much more than WHAT TO DO. It is about allowing God to work with us to “set things right” so all four of our relationships can be healed and whole and complete.

It is all about how to live, and what Jesus expects life to be in the Kingdom of Heaven. This is not some far off place, some far off time. The Kingdom of God (where God reigns and rules) is all around us. We just have to be the people, who have the guts, to live differently and allow the grace of God to shape, mold, and transform us into Kingdom people.

Let's pray...

Holy and life-giving God, you constantly show us the path to living in your Kingdom and sharing/showing others your Kingdom. Guide us to live into your grace. Heal our relationships and make us whole so we can be perfect in love, holy, like you call us to be. Open our hearts to see the “demands” of Christ as how we should really live. Help us see there is no wiggle room, and yet this is the best and easiest path to real life. All of this we pray, in Jesus' name. AMEN

Matthew 6:19-34 NIV

19 *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! 24 “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. 25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? 28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

Living By Faith

As we continue with Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, what are some things that have challenged you? What are some things you wish were different? How would you change anything?

As we have said before, Jesus is cutting straight to the heart of the matter, which is the heart of the people-their desires, their preferences, their own way of life. But remember, following Jesus means to deny ourselves, pick up our cross and follow him. The way of Jesus will lead us to die to ourselves, but we will find *life* in Jesus Christ and we will see how following him drastically transforms our way of thinking, acting, living.

Last week we saw how Jesus is teaching everything has to do with relationships. Remember if our relationship with God is right, then our relationship with ourself is right, and our relationship with others is set right. When all of this is in alignment, our relationship with creation is made right. All of this begins with *repentance* (changing our heart and mind) and realigning our life with God.

At the beginning of chapter 6, Jesus is teaching about our *piety*. This may be a new word for many. Basically what *piety* means is how we conduct ourselves on the inside and outside, in private as well as in public. Through this, Jesus is teaching whatever is going on, for us, on the inside, this is a reflection of how we live on the outside. We don't do anything to bring attention to ourselves, but only for the glory of the Kingdom of God (the reign and rule of God).

Then Jesus goes into the discourse of not storing up for ourselves anything we cannot take with us. He also goes into why we shouldn't worry. This is all about living our life in faith.

Question: How many of us have thanked God for the bread that was available in the grocery store? How many of us have thanked God for our job (whether it's liked or not, whether others see it as a job or not)? How many of us have taken the time to acknowledge that God is the source of everything we have, not Walmart or Albertsons?

The life of faith is not filled with anxiety or worry. The life of faith is filled with joy and peace. Joy and peace in the fact that God is providing everything we need! Keep in mind worry does nothing for us. Worry is like sitting in a rocking chair—it gives us something to do but gets us nowhere...we'll nowhere except wearing out the foundation. So Jesus issues the challenge not to worry.

What does a life of faith look like?

First of all, how would you describe what faith is? (Not quoting Hebrews 11:1.)

Something I have said, a few years ago is that faith is a reminder For All Is Through Him (F.A.I.T.H.) So the life of faith begins with knowing, and living, like everything comes from God. We have said it before: we actually *own* nothing. God owns everything. At the same time, God provides everything we need, out of his riches, out of his abundant grace and mercy that he freely gives to all people.

If the sparrows and lilies, in the fields, will be taken care of, why do we think God will not provide what we need? Could it be we ask, and expect, God to give us things we really don't need, and then throw a fit when we don't get what we want? Faith is trusting that God is present and working and giving us what we need, even we don't think about it.

Remember, the life of faith is guided by our trust in God. Can we truly trust God on our own? No, because we would be guided by selfish

motives, or treat God like a genie, a wish-fulfiller, to give us what we *think we want*, instead of giving us what we need.

Scripture is full of passages, prayers, and instances where God is supplying the needs of his people daily. What if we get so closed-off from seeing God's grace in our lives that we miss out on the daily manna he is providing?

Something else to keep in mind is this—what God provides, we have to step up to receive. See the Israelites, after leaving Egypt, could have left the manna on the ground and they would have missed out on the daily provision (the daily bread) God provided for them.

The life of faith is trusting in God's provision, but the life of faith also calls us to respond and change our lives, in alignment with his plan.

What does a response look like?

First of all it is taking God at his word. We trust that God will provide, even when we don't know *how* we'll get the next thing/food/provision/friend we need for a particular situation. If Jesus can multiply 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish to feed 5,000 men (20,000 or so people) we can receive God's grace to trust he will provide what we need in order to live.

Amanda, my wife, and I have to trust that God will provide for us and for our family *every time* we are sent to another town, another church. See, as pastors, we have taken the life of a missionary—to go to towns and churches we don't know and step into the work that God is doing. This, most of the time, keeps us hours away from our parents and relatives which could be a good support system. But God provides for us.

The life of faith also looks at how we can be sustainable, as a community of faith for the purpose of future generations coming to faith in Jesus

Christ. What we have seen since COVID is a rise in divisions. Everyone wants to blame others. Everyone is looking after their own self-interest. But, what if God is doing something even greater than we could ever imagine? What is God using this time of COVID to restructure and realign HIS Church? What if God is asking us to step out in faith in new ways.

It is possible that God is not seeking us to do things as we have always done them before. Have we considered God may not be asking us to live our “normal” way of life, as before COVID? It is highly possible that God is asking us to show the world his presence and his life that is freely given to those who receive, in different and new ways.

Unfortunately, one of the things COVID is showing is that 1 in 5 church buildings and congregations will close in the next 2 years, *if* they don't do something. Now, this is not meaning we become anxious or we try to take control because *we know* what “needs to be done.” No, I am believing more and more that God is doing something new and is asking us to ask him what he is doing and how he is inviting us to join him in his mission.

This can be a scary time because *church* will not look the same from here on out. But God is not saying to try and recreate the past, instead God is inviting him to step out in faith and trust him for the future that is filled with hope.

5 year plans we have done are no longer relevant. Instead, we have to see how God has been working all along, shifting society to a position where more people can be brought to faith in Jesus Christ AND be disciples to be a follower of him.

As we share and show our faith, we do life with another person/people so they (and we) can learn what it means to follow Jesus to the best life possible, and living in and experiencing the Kingdom of God daily.

Friends, God is bringing the world to us. The United States of America is the mission field. Just look at how things have changed in the last 5 years in our country.

So now what? What are the next steps?

- I'm encouraging you to be faithful to staying on task with Texarkana 1:8. Use that book as a journal to see the incredible work God is doing in and through you.
- Step out in faith and be more intentional about living our faith out in the community.
- Speak more about Jesus Christ and focus on him.
 - This may mean we need to pay less attention to the media even though we like to watch the news. But the reality is the more we indulge our desire to know what's going on around us and in the world, the more cynical and negative we become.
- Don't act like anyone has to serve you. Be the one to step out and serve another, even if we are in a restaurant or some place. Find creative ways to serve wherever you are.
- Take time to rest in the presence of God by reflecting more and more on his love *for* you...which is the same love for the rest of the world.

These are some of the ways we can step out in faith and realign our lives with God. It's all about making God the core of who we are. Because of God's incredible love for us, we have the chance to love others. If there is *any* any or malice or slander toward anyone else, while you say you love God, scripture says you're a liar. Ouch!

All of creation has what it needs to thrive. For the church (the Body of Christ, the people of God) to thrive we step out in faith and just watch what God is inviting us to join him in. God is doing an incredible work in and through you, in Red Lick, in Texarkana, in the US, in the world!

As we step out in faith, we are invited to ask God for his eyes and heart for the world. I can guarantee that we will all see more goodness and grandness *if* we ask God for the grace to trust him and lead us to live out our life in faith, for the purpose of the world (even future generations) coming to faith in Christ—on HIS terms, not ours.

Let's pray...

*Holy and life-giving God, you truly have given us everything we need. Open our eyes and hearts to where you are working and to whom you are working and sending us to. Help us to trust you, as you do provide for us daily. Gracious and Almighty God, give us the grace to bless you and help us to see that blessing you is the way to live instead of always asking you to bless us. May we always step out in faith and follow where you are leading and to whom you are leading us to. In Christ' holy name we pray,
AMEN*

Matthew 7:1-6, 13-14 NIV

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 3 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. 6 “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

...

13 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Judging

One of the challenges we face is there are many people who already know what is “right.” That’s sounds pretty judgmental, doesn’t it? But how many of you have thought of someone, this past week as a “know it all?”

As we conclude our series on the Sermon on the Mount, we can see Jesus is saying a lot in these passages in Matthew’s Gospel. I challenge you to take the time to re-read through Matthew 5-7 a few times in the next few weeks. What are some things Jesus is saying that stands out? What are some things Jesus is saying you need to hear? What are some things Jesus is saying you wish he didn’t say?

One of the things that has been sticking out to me, over the last few months for sure, is the “Kingdom of God.” We don’t use the word “kingdom” in our everyday language and conversations (unless we talk about the Bible 😊). But what does this mean? Jesus says in Matthew 6:33, “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.” So what does this mean?

“Seeking *first* the kingdom of God” simply means we are seeking for God to reign and be the ruler of all—including us! This means we are striving for what God desires and not what we think is best. Let’s be honest, if God were to tell you today to move, would you? If God told you to take a lower paying job because that would glorify him, would you? If God told you to give more money, would you? See, whenever we seek the kingdom of God, this (and so much more) is what we are really asking God to do—what we’re really saying we will do.

But, because we’re humans, and live in a state of brokenness, we end up judging for ourselves what we say is good—because it makes our lives better. Jesus calls us to live differently. Jesus calls us to live for him. Jesus

calls us to live seeking the kingdom of God instead of the kingdom of ourselves. Jesus is calling us to live lives with humility.

So, what is humility? Humility is when we put other people's needs/wants ahead of our own. A truly humble person does not get angry or bent out of shape when things don't go their way. A humble person is seeking the kingdom of God above all else. This means that we may be seeking to live out of our comfort zone.

Now in this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is teaching about judging. Before we go much further we have to understand something. Jesus is *not* talking about the everyday judgments we do everyday. We have to judge (which means to discern) what is good, healthy, right for us. We judge we like chocolate over vanilla ice cream. We judge one football team is better than all others. We judge our spouse as the person that is right for us. These are decisions we make all the time. This kind of judging is what helps us survive.

But Jesus is talking about something much different. The Greek word Jesus uses is κρίνω (kreeno) which is talking about *condemnation*. When do we condemn others? When we think ill of them just because we *think* they are doing wrong. I really shouldn't have to name examples of this because we all do this and have this attitude every single day. What this shows is how we have a higher view of ourselves and what we think we deserve versus what may really be going on.

Remember that when Jesus is teaching in the Sermon on the Mount he is constantly speaking about the condition and motives of the heart. He is showing what is going on inside each and every one of us. And as with everything else, Jesus takes this to a much deeper level.

Think about it. Jesus says don't have anger in your heart because that's the same as murder. Don't have lust in your heart because that's the same as adultery. Don't show off your religion in public. Don't save things

that don't matter. Don't worry because God has everything taken care of and gives you everything you need, when you need it. That's a lot of "don't s" But it is all there for a purpose—to not let *anything* influence us *more* than the Kingdom of God (the reign and rule of God).

So why should we not judge like Jesus is talking about? This is where it could sting bad. We should not judge (condemn, make it seem like we're better than anyone else) because *we are not God*. The other thing is that *whatever* we say bad about another person either we have done that same thing before, have acted like that, act like that, or someone else thinks we act like that. Basically Jesus is saying be very careful how you treat others and what you say about others because you will have the same thing done to you. The Apostle Paul reinforces this concept in Romans 2:1

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

As Christians, as followers of Jesus Christ we should be striving for the Kingdom of God. We should do *everything* possible to share and show the world how Jesus has changed our lives. As Christians we don't belittle anyone else, we always strive for building others up because we don't always know what people are going through.

This is challenging because we live in a culture that says we have to "take care of ourselves." But the reality is, if we don't do what's needed to take care of the least, last, lost (physically, mentally, emotionally, relationally, spiritually), then we can easily miss out on kingdom blessings because those are who experience the kingdom of God first.

This is challenging because it is human nature to care for ourselves and think more about our preferences, our wants, our desires above anyone

else. So Jesus teaches how the path to heaven is narrow because few people really find it.

I saw this quote the other day and it really stood out to me:

“Be careful not to dehumanize those you disagree with. In our self-righteousness, we can become the very things we criticize in others...and not even know it.”

Think about it. Would we want others to think about us the way we think about others? Aren't you glad that Jesus takes away guilt and condemnation from the penalty of sin and death?

As we end this message today, I invite us to hear the Message translation of this passage. It's a little more cut to the point, but I believe it speaks well to the intended message Jesus is speaking:

“Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults— unless, of course, you want the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging. It's easy to see a smudge on your neighbor's face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own. Do you have the nerve to say, ‘Let me wash your face for you,’ when your own face is distorted by contempt? It's this whole traveling road-show mentality all over again, playing a holier-than-thou part instead of just living your part. Wipe that ugly sneer off your own face, and you might be fit to offer a washcloth to your neighbor. “Don't be flip with the sacred. Banter and silliness give no honor to God. Don't reduce holy mysteries to slogans. In trying to be relevant, you're only being cute and inviting sacrilege. “Don't look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires total attention.

The beautiful thing about God's grace is this is what Jesus is saving us from. He is saving us from ourselves because if we were left to our own

devices, we would corrupt ourselves even more. The cross of Christ reminds us of what he went through to demonstrate his incredible love for you and I. The resurrection demonstrates his incredible power to defeat even the gravest of enemies. His ascension demonstrates he is preparing humanity to enter the heavenly realm. Jesus lives today and so can you and I. And it is all because of the grace he offers.

My hope and prayer is that we all strive to see the beautiful life that is found in the kingdom of God. May we always choose the path of Jesus and seek to follow him all the days of our lives. May you always remember who you are (in Christ) and who you belong to.

Let's pray...

Holy and life-giving God, you have shown us the path to true life. Jesus has taught us, through this Sermon on the Mount what it means to live in the kingdom of God. Help us choose you, O God. Help us choose salvation and life everlasting. May we be filled with so much of your joy, your peace, and your love that we share and show your glorious kingdom that has come and is all around us. Thank you for the gift of life, for the gift of knowing what you require to live in your kingdom, in your presence. Help us to live in your grace. In Christ' holy name we pray, AMEN