

The Gospels

A VERSE-BY-VERSE STUDY OF THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW – WEEK FIVE

Last week we saw Jesus fasting for 40 days and 40 nights. He was then led into the desert by the Holy Spirit where He was Tempted, Tested & Tried. Hebrews 4:15 (ESV) reminds us of the purpose of this season of Jesus' life: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."

This week we see Jesus begin raising the bar by preaching and teaching what it means to live according to the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. He is primarily teaching people who have lived their lives based on the Torah, or the Mosaic Law that consisted of 613 commands given by Moses to the Israelites before they crossed over into the promised land of Canaan. (See http://www.hisglory.us/DOCUMENTS/613_biblical_laws.htm to read all 613 of the laws given.)

In essence, God gave the law to the Israelites to demonstrate to them their deep need of Him. That they could not, on their own, keep all 613 of the laws prescribed. Yet, the Israelites, said – "We'll do it." And the first national religion was born. Over the years, priests who taught the law to the Israelite generations added their own interpretations of these laws. And each succeeding Rabbi would include his interpretations building upon the Rabbi before him. These rabbinical teachings were mostly handed down by oral tradition. By the time Jesus arrived on the scene there may have been the observance of laws in the thousands. At the end of the chapter, we see Jesus preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven and every person who encounters Him is healed and delivered of their afflictions. This Gospel Jesus taught drew people to Him and healed them. A healing that was much more than skin deep!

At the time Jesus walked the earth, Israel had moved from being known as the Hebrew people chosen by God, but rather were oppressed Jews, practicing Judaism under the harsh rule of the Roman government. Though the Jewish rulers, now known as Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes – no longer just priests attending the worship of God in the temple, and scribes recording the works of God on Israel's behalf. These men were the ruling council of their communities. They were pious, religiously devout and rigid

men who thought of themselves as higher than those around them. They readily cast judgment and prescribed punishments for the breaking of Torah. And then they encounter Jesus, who is like no man they have ever known.

Let's watch this week as we see Jesus begin this theme of Raising the Bar – and establishing grace as the standard over the Law through sacrificial love.

MATTHEW | CHAPTER FIVE

Raising Bar

Matthew 5 begins what are called discourses between Jesus and his disciples. As we seen at the end of Chapter 4 the word is getting out about this man who not only teaches about the Kingdom of God but demonstrates a power and authority that releases people from affliction and heals their diseases. In short Jesus has both an entourage, His called disciples, and a following – those affected by His ministry.

The discussions in Matthew 5 are broken up into discussions that traditionally are called “The Sermon on the Mount.”

Who do you think Jesus was teaching, or who was the intended audience in Matthew 5?

- ***The Beatitudes***

- The Greek word for blessed is *makarios*¹. It literally means “supremely blest; by extension, fortunate, well off:—blessed, happy.”
- In the culture of Judiasm the condition of living a blessed life was based upon keeping the law, but as Jesus preaches we see a different theme emerge: The beatitudes exemplify how those who serve God, no matter what manner of suffering they may endure, are BLESSED or HAPPY. Their circumstances will no longer define their station in life, and most certainly cannot change their state of being.
- Jesus’ messages are counter culture and counter religion. He truly raises the bar.

- **Salt and Light**

- The Reason for Good Works is to glorify the Father, adding the flavor of God to the world around us by our actions and our love.
- When God is glorified the Gospel becomes more than a sermon that is preached, it becomes a reality – a truth that is experienced. When Jesus spoke, realities shifted – the impossible became probable and people left having encountered the living God of love and mercy.
- The purpose of being Salt & Light is to Glorify the Father.
- Judaism as a way of life had been a life of fearful law keeping, it valued principle over people – the people lived under scrutiny and judgment daily. Judaism is a –ism, and as I considered the many isms of our world – Racism, Sexism, Nazi-ism, Fascism, Communism – these are systems of economy, religion and politics, not relationship. They are not driven by love, but by schism.
- A schism based on the Google Dictionary², is defined: *“a split or division between strongly opposed sections or parties, caused by differences in opinion or belief.”*
- The church is not immune to these isms we see in Matthew 5. As we read today consider how you value economy, religious tradition and politics over relationships with other people. Has our salt lost its saltiness? Has our light been dimmed by the divides among us?

- **Christ came to fulfill the law.**

- The life Jesus lived, the way He related to people and the things He taught perfectly fulfilled the law of His Father given to Moses. The Law had to be satisfied – and Jesus came to satisfy the requirements of the Law.
- He did not abolish the law – He came to change the way we keep it. In the context of relationship with Him and with each other.
- He gave us a new way to live – and a new way to live that would allow us to follow after Him in observing and keeping the laws of God – not just the dot and tittle, but the principle or the heart of the law as well.
- Jesus did not come to modify your behavior, He came to change the way you live, by changing what you believe about God, yourself and others.

- And in this way we, too, like Jesus will bring Glory to His Father.
 - Jesus raises the bar with what follows! In Christ the standards are raised. The law still applies – but in a brand new way.
 - Through these discussions Jesus begins to reveal a new understanding toward the Law. The purpose of the Law is now no longer just about pointing us to our deep need and dependence on God (pointing us to Him for salvation) but also bids us to bring our hearts fully into alignment with Him.
 - Obedience is not about right behavior, but rather a heart sold out and surrendered living for and worshipping God alone.
- **Anger**
 - Jesus equates hate, or a response in retaliatory anger, with murder.
 - You have heard... But I say... What is the heart of this message?
 - **Lust**
 - Jesus equates lust, or a desire to possess or to have sex with someone, to adultery.
 - **Divorce**
 - Jesus is now addressing the Jewish custom of divorce, meaning that a man could marry and eventually return to his wife and divorce her for little to no reason at all. They were regularly divorcing their wives to marry another and still believing they were honoring God.
 - In this time – a woman abandoned through divorce for unjust cause would be destitute, and it is believed many of the women who were prostitutes of this time had been divorced. Jesus addresses this issue with a strong prohibition against divorce except in marital unfaithfulness.
 - **Oaths**
 - Jesus raises the bar as he observes that many swear oaths they do not keep, but piously consider themselves as having kept the law if they simply do not bear false witness against someone else. Here Jesus equates breaking an oath with lying.

- He says don't swear – but rather, be a person who does what you say you will do.
- Practice what you preach. (Don't be a hypocrite.)
- **Retaliation & Love your enemies**
 - Now he has gone to meddling. We see throughout the Old Testament how God told the people of Israel to annihilate outsiders and we see through the Psalms the heart cry for God to deal mercilessly with our enemies. But, Jesus says we should love our enemies.
 - A desire for vengeance is a natural response to offense.
 - He tells them not to resist those who are evil, but rather to become selfless and generous toward all people. And in this way be a witness to God's unfailing love.
 - Remember: It is easy to love those who love you, but a much harder task to love those who oppose you – even hurting you.

Next week we will continue in these discussions with Chapter Six. As Jesus continues to raise the bar.

Questions for reflection:

1. How can our righteousness exceed that of the Scribes & Pharisees?
2. What does it mean to be perfect?
3. How can I be perfect?
4. Am I seeking my own glory or God's glory?

End Notes

¹ Blue Letter Bible, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?strongs=G3107>

² Google Dictionary, <https://www.google.com/search?q=Dictionary>

