

# *The Sermon on the Mount*

Matt 5-7  
Adult Bible Study

## I. Introductory Matters

### A. What is a Gospel?

1. We think we know until we try to define it. But there are four basic qualities or purposes we can identify
  - a. It maintains contact with the Jesus of History
    - (1) Redemption is an event not just an idea!
    - (2) It is an historical account. But it is a theological history. That is to say,
      - (a) The Gospels record the things Jesus actually said and did.
      - (b) But the accounts are selective, not exhaustive.
      - (c) Each Gospel writer, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, selected and assembled the historical events from the many things Jesus said and did
  - b. Always embraces and claims the stumbling block of the cross
  - c. Always announces and extends the Grace of God to everyone.
    - (1) That to which the gospels summon us is not merely an ideal, it is invitation to the life of grace.
    - (2) The words convey the reality of the Power of the Cross and resurrection
    - (3) The Gospels are not merely for the elite or sophisticated
    - (4) Rom 1:16 *the gospel is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*
    - (5) A true gospel, if read with faith, always results in a life of righteousness by the power and grace of God.
  - d. The purpose of a Gospel is to put us in living, conscious and personal contact With Jesus Christ. To explain who it is who it is that is calling you right now to conversion and to a totally new life.
2. A gospel is more than a memoir. Memoirs have as their goal to perpetuate, defend or exult the memory of a dead master. But the gospel's goal is to put you in touch with the living Lord.
  - a. John 20:31 *but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.*

### B. The Sermon on the Mount is often called a great moral treatise of the Lord

1. But be careful.
2. The danger is that we see the sermon as a long (exhausting) list of things

- to do, a legalism, a morality.
- 3. But Christianity is not a morality
  - a. it is a transformative relationship which not only has moral implications but is the effective cause of the moral life.
- 4. Too many, (even Christian) moral treatises amount to a set a rules and a system of behavior in which God is actually outside the system looking down in judgement.
- 5. But note the Catechism's title for the moral section is not "Christian Morality" but rather, "Life in Christ"
  - a. The Order in which the Moral Section appears is also important.

C. What then *is* the Sermon on the Mount?

- 1. It is a description of what life in Christ really looks like and is.
- 2. It is a description of the normal Christian life.
  - a. I'll actually love my enemy (5:43ff)
  - b. I won't want or need to retaliate (5:38ff)
  - c. I won't be angry all the time (5:21ff)
  - d. I'll want to be reconciled to those I have offended (5:23)
  - e. I'll actually love my spouse and never even consider divorce (5:31ff)
  - f. My sexual life will be under my authority (5:27ff)
  - g. My thought life will be under my authority (5:28)
  - h. I'll be generous (6:1ff)
  - i. My relationship with the Heavenly Father will be vital and the greatest reality in my life (6)
  - j. etc.
- 3. It is a glimpse into the heart, mind and behavior of someone in whom Christ is really living.
- 4. By the use of focal instances, antitheses, and practical examples, Jesus paints a picture of what a truly transformed person is like.
- 5. Please not this picture is not exhaustive or intended to be.

- D. A quick tour of the sermon's component parts:
1. The beatitudes 5:1-12
  2. The similes of salt and light 5:13-16
  3. The principle of fulfillment of the law 5:17-20
  4. About anger 5:21-26
  5. About adultery 5:27-30
  6. About divorce 5:31-32
  7. About oaths and integrity 5:33-37
  8. About retaliation 5:38-42
  9. Love of enemies 5:43-48
  10. About Almsgiving 6:1-4
  11. About prayer 6:5-15
  12. About fasting 6:16-18
  13. Treasure in heaven 6:19-21
  14. The sound eye 6:22-23
  15. God or money 6:24
  16. Dependence on God 6:25-34
  17. Judging others 7:1-5
  18. Pearls before swine 7:6
  19. Power of prayer 7:7-11
  20. The golden rule 7:12
  21. The narrow gate 7:13-14
  22. False prophets 7:15-20
  23. The true disciple 7:21-23
  24. Exhortation to hear and heed the teaching 7:24-27
  25. Reaction of the crowd 7:28-29

## I. The Beatitudes

***A. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.***

### B. Preliminaries about all the beatitudes

1. Not a legalism - As a prelude, please remember the beatitudes do not describe a course of action or a new legalism. They are not a checklist to meet. They describe the heart, mind and activity of an individual who is being transformed by the grace of Jesus Christ. The beatitudes result from the transformative power of the relationship between Jesus and the faithful believer. The danger of legalism is that we read each beatitude and wonder if we qualify rather than ask the question,
  - a. I wonder what he means?"
  - b. What reality is Jesus describing here and how do I experience it?
  - c. What barriers block my experiencing it?
  - d. What are the implications of this beatitude for my mind, my heart and my behavior?
  - e. How can the attitude described in each beatitude both transform me and indicate transformation already underway?
  
2. Each of the Beatitudes begin with the Greek word *Makarios* which is variously translated, blessed or happy, fortunate. The Hebrew equivalent is *Ashre*. In the Old Testament the word seeks to describe the present blessings of a person who follows a course set out by God. For example in Psalm 1: *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water; that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.* In other words, if you do this, you are blessed or will experience blessing. Jesus takes up this reasoning but in a transformed way. No longer is beatitude the result of human decision and achievement, it is a result of the presence and availability of the kingdom. These beatitudes are available to you now that the kingdom is present among you - this is the power of grace, the power of the cross and resurrection.

3. The kingdom is now
  - a. Isaiah 61:1 *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion -- to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.*
  - b. Luke 4:20 *And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*
  - c. In the beatitudes Jesus is saying that what God promised is now fulfilled, now available.
  
4. Already and not yet -
  - a. Note the temporal dimension, you are *now* blessed (Blessed *are* the ...). The blessedness is not something to be attained, it is something that has already been conferred. That is to say, the demand is not a human accomplishment for which we must strive, but a blessing we must receive. To the degree that we see the beatitude at work in us it is the result of blessing already conferred.
  - b. There is also a future dimension promised (in every beatitude except the first): for they *will be* ....)

**C. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

1. Who are the poor in spirit?
  - a. The Hebrew word behind the Greek word poor (*ptochos*) is *Anaw*
  - b. There is a history behind the word:
    - (1) In the Babylonian Captivity most never returned.
    - (2) Those who did were called the anawin
    - (3) These were they who were so dedicated to God that they were willing to forsake the whole world just to dwell with God, just to have the kingdom.
    - (4) To be anaw is to be wholly dedicated to God. So completely that the world and all its power, possessions and popularity are forsaken. God is first, his kingdom is preferred to all that this world offers
    - (5) Is 66:2 *Thus says the LORD, this is the man to whom I will look, he that is poor and broken in spirit, and who trembles at my word.*
    - (6) Lk 14:33 *So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.*
  - c. Note therefore the poor in spirit does not denote an income level. However, there *are* financial and social implications to being poor in spirit. You can't be wholly dedicated to God and not have there be implications
    - (1) Moses
    - (2) Jesus
    - (3) The Nurse
    - (4) The businessman
2. These "poor" are blessed already since they are already enjoying the kingdom. This is where their heart is. That some of the blessings of the world are not experienced is of little impact to them since the blessings of knowing God and power of the cross so outweigh any loss. They may not have all of what the world demands but they have what they need. And all they need is God! Everything else is secondary
  - a. Mat 6:33 *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*
  - b. Mat 6:21 *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*
3. Questions
  - a. What really is most important and precious to you?
  - b. What implications are there for you in being a Christian
  - c. Do you suffer loss for being a Christian? How?
  - d. Is your detachment from worldly blessings love for heavenly things increasing?
  - e. How is Jesus bringing this beatitude more alive in you?
4. This beatitude us foundational to all that follows.

**D. *Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.***

1. Who are those who mourn? They are those who see the awful state of God's people. That God is not glorified in his people because they are unfaithful to him. Because they are suffering the consequences of their sins. And the plan of God and the mind of God for his people is not being realized. They see the beauty of God, his plan, and his kingdom and grieve that so many do not. That so many are debased and confused. That so many do not even know why they were made.
2. Do you mourn? When was the last time you were really moved to pray for God's people? When was the last time you really prayed for God's people and for this tragic hell-bound, sin-soaked world?
3. Distinction - So often when we perceive the problems of the world we merely wring our hands and complain. But when Jesus really lives his life in us we mourn and this mourning motivates us to earnest prayer and action to lead people to God and to the glorious truth of the gospel.
4. How are the mournful blessed? Because they see the beauty of the kingdom. It's vision has filled them with light and joy. It is the *contrast* of the world that causes them to mourn but this mourning is rooted deep appreciation of the beauty of the kingdom. This vision and experience of the kingdom is a blessing. So is the love and concern they have for all God's people a blessing.
5. You will be comforted -
  - a. Because you're sad over the right thing
  - b. What makes you sad should make you sad
  - c. You're not sad because you flunked out of Harvard or your Porsche got smashed up
  - d. You're sad because God is not adored and worshiped. Because God's people don't show forth the face of God. You're sad because of the suffering brought about due the sins of God's people.
  - e. You will be comforted because the Kingdom of God is now here and your prayers will make a difference.

**E. *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.***

1. This is very similar to the first beatitude since the Hebrew word, *Anaw* which is the background for this text is translated as either Poor or Meek.
2. Perhaps we have Jewish poetry at work here wherein the rhyme is in the thought not the sound.
3. Hence it is difficult from an historical perspective to know what Jesus means. It seems merely a repetition.
4. However the original text is in Greek, not Hebrew so most commentaries draw deeply from the historical meaning of the Greek word here: *praotes*
  - a. At the heart of the Greek word is a person who has authority over their anger. There is a time to be angry and allow expression of this anger. There is also a time to curb anger and redirect its energy. In this sense, perhaps the Lord utters this beatitude as a balance to the previous one. Mourning and grief can lead to anger or depression. Proper control of sorrow and anger are a necessary virtue for the second beatitude to flourish.
  - b. A second meaning of the Greek word is to refer to a person who enjoys a self-control, who is not easily carried away by passions of any sort.
  - c. Yet a third meaning of the Greek word is humility. Humility banishes all pride. Here too is a virtue that may help balance the second beatitude. Those who mourn the state of the world could fall into a possible sense of superiority: the world is all wrong and I am all enlightened. They may forget their own struggle with sin as they mourn over the sins of others. Humility governs this and keeps our mourning "pure."
5. Who are the meek -
  - a. They are those totally devoted to the Kingdom of God. Those who love God unreservedly, more than anything or anyone. They are those who experience the total kingship of God in their life and who, by God's grace, have their passions governed under God's authority. This too is why they are blessed.
6. Inherit the Land?
  - a. For a Jewish mind, the land meant the Promised Land. And the Promised Land was a symbol for all that God promised.
  - b. The meek therefore stand to inherit all God has promised: Heaven, all the kingdom blessings of grace and power over sin, and God himself.

***F. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.***

1. What you want you get. It is a usual truth that when we really want something we work hard and we usually get it.
2. Consider the American Dream that so animates the average person.
  - a. Immigrants sell all they have, risk their very lives for it.
  - b. Parents make sacrifices to see their children through colleges.
  - c. Years are spent studying and preparing for a worldly career
  - d. Overtime, part-time jobs, etc. Hours in lottery lines!
  - e. All in hopes of the American dream
3. But when it comes to the heavenly vision is there such thirst?
  - a. Do I have to go to Church?
  - b. Do I have to pray?
  - c. Do I have to give up sin and change my life?
  - d. That's unreasonable! Many say.
4. Who are they that hunger and thirst ? - But when Christ really lives his life in us we will hunger, thirst and long for the things of God, the things of the kingdom. We will yearn to be free of sin and enjoy the life of grace. We will have a steadfast desire for the things of God that far eclipses any desire for anything here. This yearning will make us eager for the things of God.
5. And here is the blessing. That we, by God's grace strongly desire that which is saving, helpful and transformative. We desire grace more than sin, truth more than lies, heaven more than earth. We do not strive after the things of God because we have to but because we want to.
6. How are they satisfied - what you want you get. If we want the things of God and His Kingdom we will get them. And the more we desire these things the more we will get them. We will be willing to forsake anything for it. We observe a transformation in ourselves -
  - a. I would rather pray and read scripture than watch hours of TV
  - b. I find sin increasingly abhorrent.
  - c. I love the ways of God more and more.
  - d. *I heard my mother say, Give me Jesus. You may have all this world. Give me Jesus*

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

1. How difficult it is to forgive. Especially when we have been hurt.
2. But when Jesus lives his life in us and we in him, we experience the power to love and have affection even for our enemy, even for those who have done us great harm .
3. How difficult it is for us to love.
4. But when Christ lives in us and we in him, we are able to love and have a deep love and affection for the needy among us, even the needy who are pushy and in their hurts have great anger or bitterness.
5. And here is the blessing, that we can love even the difficult, even those who harm us or are our enemy and mean us ill. What a burden of hatred and bitterness is lifted from us. What a blessing to be free from this awful burden.
6. And in this blessing come further blessings. We will be shown mercy. In many ways Scripture shows how a lack of mercy, an unforgiving attitude is a slippery path to hell.
  - a. *Mat 6:14 For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*
  - b. *Mat 18:32 Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."*
  - c. *Luke 6:37 forgive, and you will be forgiven;*
  - d. *James 2:13 For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy; yet mercy triumphs over judgment.*

**H. *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.***

1. The Greek Word *katharos* (the Hebrew word *bar*) can be translated clean or pure in the generic sense. But a more specific meaning refers to something that is pure, unmixed with anything foreign, unalloyed. Hence there is the concept here of being single-hearted, a pure and single motive. No mixed motive. I just want to know God.
2. Who then are the clean of heart? Who are the single hearted? They are those who have a heart wholly devoted to God so that everything is done from the pure and single motive that they love God and want to see his glory and grace spread everywhere. They want only the Kingdom and what God wants.
3. Here too is an echo of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. The single hearted have set their focus on God and have no admixture of self love, pride, love of fame and the world. It is the single minded focus that produces results just like the hunger of the hungry motivates their every decision.
4. Scripture in other places described a pure and single hearted devotion to God and the Kingdom
  - a. Phil 3:13 *but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, be thus minded...*
  - b. Luke 10:41 *"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*
  - c. James 1:8 *A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*
  - d. Ps 27:4 *One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.*
5. They will see God -
  - a. *Sicut supra* - what you want you get.
  - b. Now that the Kingdom of God is here, we have access to the Father. Jesus has opened the door.

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

1. The Hebrew word shalom serves as the background for the Greek word, *eirene*. Shalom is never merely the absence of conflict. We think if we're not killing each other there is peace. But for a Jew of the first century Shalom meant the presence in the relationship of everything that should be there. It is obvious that this is an open-ended concept and cannot be simply described in a formulaic or legalistic sense. Yet it is also obvious that there are clear contours of peace:
  - a. Reciprocal justice
  - b. Mutual respect and understanding
  - c. Truth spoken in love
  - d. Reciprocal Providence
2. Note therefore that the beatitude cannot be read to mean "Blessed are those who seek to eliminate all conflict at any cost." There is a time to air our differences and deal with them honestly. Without this there is no shalom. Further shalom must be rooted in the truth. Hence shalom cannot be found by shunning the truth claims of our faith or watering it down. Jesus was clear that there was such a thing as a false peace, *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you* (Jn 14:27).
3. Yet it remains true that point two must also be balanced with an approach that is not merely argumentative. There are matters in which we can give way. There are also differences with which we live.
4. Note that the beatitude does not say "Blessed are the peace lovers." Rather they are blessed who actively work to establish a climate wherein shalom flourishes between individuals, communities and nations
5. They are called the children of God - Why? Because it pertains to God to restore a right relationship between Himself and us. And, by extension to see this right relationship, shalom, come to be among us. It is the work of the devil to divide. God unites us in the truth and brings shalom by restoring us to justice by his grace. Hence those who are truly his children, do the works of God, they imitate and show forth the face of God. They are a "chip off the ole block."
6. We do well to ask ourselves some questions
  - a. Do I see peace merely as the absence of conflict or something richer?
  - b. How is truth related to shalom?
  - c. What are the things I must insist on (because they are true) in my relationships with others
  - d. Are there some petty things I cling to which deprive my relationships of peace?
  - e. How is forgiveness related to peace - making?

J. ***Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.***

1. Here is the strangest beatitude of all. It is a blessing to be persecuted? A blessing indeed for it was a sign of having been summoned out of the world and having received the kingdom. Recall the words of Jesus. *If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.* (Jn 15:19) Here then is a sign of having entered into the kingdom, hatred of the world.
2. Recall too the warning of Jesus: *Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.* (Lk 6:26) If I am not persecuted for my faith, why not?<sup>1</sup> Do I have any enemies?<sup>2</sup> I *should*.
3. To the degree that I inherit the kingdom and live its truth, the world will puzzle over me. We'll be called odd, be laughed at, called fools and worse, be discriminated against. The early Christians had it worse. They were often disowned, disinherited, lost jobs, were imprisoned, and even killed for their faith. In many parts of the world today this is still happening. *Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted* (2 Tim 3:12)
4. Note the persecution is on account of our faith, on account of Jesus. Being persecuted for being a jerk is not meritorious. The text is clear in this regard: ***[Blessed are you when they] utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me.*** Thus not all persecution is meritorious. Only that comes from our entrance into the kingdom. *and keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing right, if that should be God's will, than for doing wrong.* 1 Peter 3:16
5. So what is the blessing? The kingdom! Know God and being in a vital and transformative relationship is a blessing that far outweighs any suffering the world can dish out. The blessing extends into the future to a full sharing in the kingdom of heaven.
6. Is the Kingdom of God worth more to you than any worldly blessing? Does it outweigh any worldly suffering?

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<sup>1</sup>Many Christians have sadly thought of Christianity as winning a popularity contest.

<sup>2</sup>Today we think of an enemy as someone I don't like. But biblically an enemy is anyone who wills me harm.

II. The similes of Salt and Light

A. **13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. 14 You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. 16 Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.**

B. The very first word of this passage should not be overlooked: YOU. *You* are the salt of the earth....*you* are the light of the world. Who is? You are. We are so used to presuming we are too small or unimportant to have influence. But Jesus was speaking to ordinary people when he made this declaration. There were very few people of importance among his disciples. Few if any glitteratti, the intelligentsia, the influential, walked with Jesus. Most were simple Galilean folk. The Galilean's were looked down upon by the Jerusalemites. They were the country cousins and backwater bumpkins of their day. It was to these simple folk that Jesus said, YOU. He also speaks to us. What ever our state, it remains true, being a faithful Christian at our post is how we will transform the world. We don't have to wait until we become famous or a world leader, we are already light and salt if we are faithful.

C. Salt? What did the Jew of the first Century think of we Jesus spoke this?

1. First of all salt was valuable. Some were even paid with salt (which is where we get the word salary).
2. Salt was connected with purity. Saltwater It was applied to infections and wounds. New Born babies were washed salt water. Etc.
3. Salt was connected with preservation. In the years before refrigeration salt was one of the commonest ways to preserve meat and fish.
4. Salt was connected with flavor. It adds spice to life, it brings out the flavor in a food.
5. Hence the Christian is to purify and preserve this wounded and decaying world. The Christian is to bring flavor to life in a world that is so often filled with despair and meaninglessness.
6. Not too the inward quality of salt. Salt goes inward and disappears, having its effect. The Christian is often called to work quietly, subtly, within the framework of society and yet have a clear effect. This is in distinction to the image of light which is outward and obvious in its effects.

D. Salt goes flat? We are not used to salt going flat. But salt in the ancient world was frequently less pure. It came from the sea and was admixed with other things. And the compound broke down the salt could go flat (tasteless) or become bitter. In this case it was useless except as pavement. The image is a powerful portrait of a Christian who has become debased. The fall is steep, from a worthy, esteemed

necessary and helpful place (like good salt) to ignoble pavement trampled unappreciated beneath the feet of people they should have blessed with savor and sweetness.

- E. The Light of the World - If salt is hidden and inward, Light is obvious and outward. Christians are to be a visible and active in the darkened world. Light scatters darkness, so Christians are to scatter ignorance and bring light to a darkened world.
1. Is not Jesus the light of the World? Read John 8:12 *Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* Hence we are light because Christ has enlightened us.
  2. Notice - you are THE light. There is no other light. If we do not shine and reflect the glory of Christ's face, the world is in darkness. As we look at the confusion around us today we cannot evade responsibility. This has happened on our watch.
  3. Christ is clear, he did not light a light in us to hide it under a bed or bushel basket. We are supposed to shine. There are too many
    - a. Undercover Christians
    - b. Secret Agent Saints
    - c. Hidden Holy Ones
  4. Image of the city on a hill -
    - a. Again note that Christ expects us to be prominent. No notion of religion being a private matter here. We are to be visible, vital and vocal.
    - b. Note too the collective quality. Envision a city on a distant hill. There are countless little lights in each window. Each little light adds us to one bright light. So too with each Christian. We are to let our little light shine. Together these lights amount to great brightness, visible even from space.
  5. What is the light? Our "good deeds." Good deeds here should be understood as more than giving money to the poor and similar sorts of things. These are included but good deeds should be interpreted more widely as pertaining to the living of a transformed life. As Christ lives his life in us, we are filled with the light of a new life. We show forth the transformation of a whole new life.
  6. Note the emphasis - your light *must* shine
    - a. Your light - each of us manifest some very specific aspect of God's glory. Image - stained glass
    - b. Must - not really in the Greek but it ought to be ☺

### III. The Principle of the Law and its Fulfillment

A. *17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. 18 Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place. 19 Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 20 I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

B. The key words in this passage are “fulfill” and “surpass” This instruction on the law sets the stage for the antitheses that follow.

1. **Fulfill** (pleroon) can mean to meet the requirements of something. But as used here it means something more: fulfill means to “fill it full.” That is, to do more than meet the requirements but to go beyond and meet all the positive implications of something. For example, Jesus was born in Bethlehem and so met the requirement that the messiah would be born there. But he does more than that. Bethlehem means “house of bread” and so Jesus declares, *“I am the living bread that has come down from heaven for one to eat and never die.* (John 6:51) Hence he fills full the implications of what it means to be born in Bethlehem.
2. Jesus takes this notion of fulfilling the law. He teaches that for one who lives in Christ, and Christ in them, merely meeting the demands of the law is an inadequate description of what will take place. Rather, to the degree that Christ lives in us, we will fill full all the implications of the Law. He gives examples of what he means through six antitheses (You have heard it said...but I say to you). In each case he states a law or principle and then broadens its scope. For example, it is not enough to avoid murdering (thus meeting the requirement of the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment). Rather we must see put to death in us all the vicious anger, resentment, contempt and hatred that leads to murder and murderous wishes. Further we must actively seek reconciliation with those we have offended. It is not enough to avoid adultery (and so meet the requirement of the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment). If Christ is living in us we will see put to death all lustful and impure thoughts. We will have authority over our mind. We shall look in detail at all the antitheses. But for now note the principle of fulfillment and how it is applied. Here is the Christian life. Not in the legalism of the scribes and pharisees. Rather in the wide open implications of the Love of God at work in us through a transformative relationship with Jesus Christ.
3. The antitheses are not exhaustive (there are only six!) but are illustrative. As if the Lord says, “Now here’s an illustration of what ought to be going on in your mind and heart all the time.” The antitheses use “focal instances” by way of example to illustrate the deeper movements of the mind and heart of a true Christian. A focal instance is like a window into

the kingdom. It uses a concrete situation in order to give us insight into a whole new inner life; a whole new way to look at reality and respond to that reality. Because of the power of the death and resurrection of Jesus, because he lives his life in us, because the kingdom is now here, there is a whole new life available to us. Now we are able to live as the Lord always intended. Here are six examples of what that life is like, exteriorly and interiorly.

4. **Surpasses** - (*perisson*) this word helps to illustrate and further describe what is meant by fulfillment of the Law. The scribes and pharisees met the bare requirements of the law, but little more. A true Christian fulfills, that is, surpasses the mere requirement of the Law by entering into the fuller implications of the law. The Christian does not say, what is the least I can do? Rather, what more can I do?
5. Note that this is the nature of Love. It is open ended and goes beyond mere requirements. Love is extravagant Consider a couple of examples
  - a. Young man in love with a young lady
    - (1) Do I have to spend time?
    - (2) What's the cheapest gift I can buy for your birthday?
    - (3) The cheapest wedding ring?
  - b. Love does not ask such questions

C. Now some other particulars about this text

1. ***18 Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place.***
  - a. This text can create some problems if we do not make distinctions. Did not the Lord set aside many things such as Sabbath particulars, ritual washings, later on kosher laws?
  - b. We need to make a distinction therefore between three kinds of law:
    - (1) Ceremonial precepts
    - (2) legal prescriptions governing human interrelationships
    - (3) God's moral law.
  - c. Jesus means only the moral Law here in verse 18 if we observe his overall practice and teaching. Regarding the moral law from God, it is unchanging and forever binding.
2. ***unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.***
  - a. Here note what we have already said about surpassing
  - b. Note too the reference to the kingdom. To enter the kingdom means to enter into a life changing transformative relationship with Jesus Christ wherein he shepherd and rules our mind and heart. When he does this we will surpass a mere legal minimalism. We will do more than meet the requirements of the law, we will fulfill

all the implications. This is a sign and effect of being in the kingdom. It is the fruit of faith.

#### IV. The Antitheses

A. Regarding Anger - *You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.'* 22 *But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, 'Raca,' will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to fiery Gehenna.* 23 *Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, 24 leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.* 25 *Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court with him. Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison.* 26 *Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny.*

1. Note first the formula: “*You have heard that it was said....but I say to you.*” Here is indicated the authority of Jesus. Jesus is on par with the commandment. He is not merely interpreting the Law or giving an opinion. Jesus *is* the Law. He is the Word made flesh. He speaks with the authority of God on Mt. Sinai.
2. *You shall not kill* - the fifth commandment, Ex 20:13; Deut 5:17.
3. *But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment*
  - a. *Orgizo* - grow angry, to provoke or enrage.
    - (1) Not all anger is condemned in scripture
      - (a) Eph 4:26 Be angry but do not sin;
      - (b) Jesus was often angry.
      - (c) Anger is the normal, even appropriate response when we experience or perceive injustice, falsehood, or anything that is wrong.
    - (2) The anger condemned here is the anger of bitterness and revenge. The anger we do not address and allow to grow within our hearts and minds. Then anger to which we cling and refuse to attempt reconciliation. The anger that leads to contempt and the refusal to recognize the dignity of another. The anger that leads to murder, whether actual murder or the spiritual murder that declares, “Drop dead.” This is anger to which we cling and even revel in.
    - (3) If Christ lives in us, we can have authority over unrighteous anger and be free of it.
4. *and whoever says to his brother, 'Raca,' will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to fiery Gehenna.*
  - a. Raca and fool mean basically the same thing. However the English word does not quite capture the hurt and significance of the word

at the time of Jesus. Raqa meant empty, godless fool. It was a very personal refusal to recognize the dignity of another person. Note that the penalty for the use of such terms was severe. The use of such terminology could be a legally actionable matter before the Jewish court, the Sanhedrin. Jesus adds that such a depersonalizing attitude that is signified by such speech could lead a person to hell. Why? Because depersonalizing other people and seeing them as godless and infidels sets the foundation for violence and horrible injustice. For example, many did not consider slaves fully human. This meant that they did not need to be accorded basic human rights or seen as brethren.

- b. If Christ is living in us how could we do such a thing? To the degree that Jesus lives in us such behavior will recede and be unthinkable to us.

5. ***Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, 24 leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. -***

- a. In other words, don't even think about going to worship God with this kind of sin on your soul. If you have offended someone through bad behavior or disrespect, if you have hatred and bigotry in your heart and/or reflected in your behavior, if you have offended against the human dignity or another, made in the image of God your first priority is to be reconciled. It's important to offer your gift, but don't even think of showing up until you've apologized and reconciled.
- b. Here too, for one in Christ, even if we sin through weakness, we will desire to be reconciled because the love, mercy and understanding of Jesus is in us.

6. ***Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court with him. Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. 26 Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny.-***

- a. In other words don't play games. This is serious. This is a matter of judgement. Are you in Christ or not? Are you letting him live in you and have authority over your life? If you are then it is clear he will lead you to reconciliation with others. You will even love your enemy (see below). If we fail to yield to Christ and his kingship in this regard we will be judged. At best we can expect purgatory (for the punishment described here is one from which we can be released). But note too the mention of Gehenna (hell) above.
- b. Note that the context here is people we have offended. Yet in an

extended sense there is also a work of Christ wherein we also seek reconciliation with those who have offended us through forgiveness. The Lord warns elsewhere that mercy once received must issue in mercy shown.<sup>3</sup>

- (1) Mat 6:14 *For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*
- (2) Mat 18:32 *Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."*
- (3) Luke 6:37 *forgive, and you will be forgiven;*
- (4) James 2:13 *For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy; yet mercy triumphs over judgment.*

7. What then is the vision of this antithesis? That to the degree that Christ lives in me and I in him, I cannot despise another human being. I will reverence their life. I will seek to reconcile myself with everyone I have offended and seek reconciliation even with those who have offended me. This is the heart of Christ who reconciles us to the Father and loves everyone he made.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>However, note the obligation to leave our gift at the altar and first be reconciled would not apply since we cannot control the outcome in this case.

<sup>4</sup>This does not mean that we fail to speak the truth to one another. Note that Jesus “offended” many by his announcement of the Truth. Sometimes people take offense when no offense is intended.

**B. *You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into Gehenna.***

1. ***You shall not commit adultery*** - The sixth commandment, Ex 20:14; Dt 5:18.
2. From a strictly legal point of view the committing of adultery could be rather narrowly defined: Two people, at least one of which is married have sexual relations. Therefore if both are unmarried there is no infraction. Hence the law is interpreted only to forbid the breaking of the marriage vow.
3. Jesus corrects this and widens the scope of the law to embrace all its implications. In effect he teaches that the sixth commandment in a summons to sexual purity at every level, even at the level of thoughts. Our whole self is summoned to purity. Such purity is possible when Christ lives in us.
4. **What is lust?** Is merely noticing the beauty of another lust? No, this is normal and good. Occasionally sexual thoughts will occur to someone that they then dismiss. This is not lust either since it is not directly willed and is rejected. Where lust begins is when one begins to willfully fantasize sexually about someone to whom they are married. Here is where lust begins and sin enters.
5. Therefore by extension is excluded other matters:
  - a. Pornography which is intentional lustful looking
  - b. Masturbation which is rooted in indulging in lust thinking
  - c. Fornication (premarital sex). If it is wrong to think about sexual matters with someone I am not married to, it is even more wrong to do so. Fornication is elsewhere forbidden in many texts of the New Testament. Here is an example and some other references:
    - (1) As for lewd conduct or promiscuousness or lust of any sort, let them not even be mentioned among you; your holiness forbids this. Nor should there be any obscene, silly or suggestive talk; all that is out of place. Instead, give thanks. Make no mistake about this: no fornicator, no unclean or lustful person - in effect an idolater - has any inheritance in the kingdom of God. Let no one deceive you with worthless arguments. These are sins that bring God's wrath down upon the disobedient; therefore, have nothing to do with them. (Ephesians 5:3-7)
    - (2) See also:
      - (a) (Revelation 21:5-8)
      - (b) (Rev. 22:14-16)

- (c) (Galatians 5:16-21).
- (d) (Matt. 15:19-20)
- (e) (Mark 7:21)
- (f) (Colossians 3:5-6).
- (g) (I Cor. 6:9-11, 15-20)
- (h) (I Thess. 4:1-8)
- (i) (I. Timothy 1:8-11)
- (j) (Heb 13:4)

6. While homosexuality is not dealt with here explicitly it is dealt with in other places. Let such texts suffice for our purpose. The teaching of scripture is unambiguous in this regard: homosexual activity is forbidden and under no circumstances allowable.
7. Note the vision. It is possible to have authority over our thought life. Not just about this matter, but all matters! What Jesus is describing is such an interior peace and authority brought about through the power of the cross and resurrection and by this transformative relationship that actually, interiorly we are not angry, jealous, fearful, excessively ambitious, lustful. We're not just fighting this stuff, we have authority over it. This is remarkable. You see, what has happened when we have capitulated to reduced notions of the Christian life. We think we're doing great if we just perform well or do the right thing. But the Christian life goes deeper than that! What's going on in your mind and heart? You can have authority over your thoughts. You don't have to think the way your thinking. What Jesus is teaching is that the heart and mind of a human being can be transformed by the Holy Spirit. This is what we are called to live.
8. What Jesus specifically teaches here is that we look on another with lust, of course we've already sinned. What he is talking about is so relating to one another that our sexual desires are not out of order at all. Consider for example the basis of much of the advertising that goes on in the media. It's founded on flagrant disobedience to Jesus Christ. It's rooted in lust. Mostly the portrayal of women and advertisers trying to get men to lust after them and buy the car, the shaving soap and so forth. And that's a sin! That's a corruption of the way God has intended us to live. Many of the styles are calculated to have someone lust after someone in their heart because it gives attraction and power and all sorts of things. Jesus is teaching that this is absolutely contrary to the way my Father wants you to live and has enabled you to live. Do you see what a different vision of reality this offers us?
9. ***If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out -***
  - a. This is not a literal prescription but is a Jewish way of speaking through the use of hyperbole. It means, "Face it. This is serious. There are enormous consequences to what is going on in your life." It also means that it is more serious to sin this regard than to lose your eye or right hand. We don't think like this. We minimize sin and trivialize it's significance. God does not.

- b. At a practical level the saying means this: guard carefully what you look at and do. There are consequences to what we look at, what we do. “If your cable TV is your problem, cut the cable. If your internet is your problem, set the filter. If your movies and books are your problem, cut it out. If anything you are doing is threatening your salvation, cut it out.
10. Here too is a call to freedom in Christ Jesus. When I am in Him and He in me, I do not have to be enslaved by sex or any of my passions. I can be free. Not only in my behavior but even in my mind. When Jesus lives in me I begin to experience this freedom.

C. ***"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce.' 32 But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.***

1. Some particulars:

a. There was already a biblical frowning on divorce in the text of Malachi 2:14ff *the LORD is witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Has not the one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life? And what does he desire? Godly offspring. So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. "For I hate divorce, says the LORD the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless."*

b. Yet it was also true that Moses had grudgingly permitted divorce: *If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house.* (Dt 24:1). A woman could not initiate divorce only a man. She had no say in the matter at all. All that had to happen was that a man hand the bill of divorce to her in the presence of two witnesses, and she was divorced. There were debates over what the law meant by "something indecent." There were two schools of thought about the interpretation:

(1) School of Shammai - the more conservative school which held that the phrase meant unchastity (adultery) and nothing but that.

(2) School of Hillel - the more liberal school which defined the phrase in the widest possible sense to mean anything the man found unacceptable. For example, valid grounds could be too much salt in the food or simply that he no longer found her attractive.

(3) At the time of Jesus the liberal school was most popular and divorce was a problem. Jesus speaks against the divorce culture of his day.

c. The text before us here is a shorter version of Jesus' fuller teaching in Matt. 19. In that text Jesus speaks to the men of his day and identifies the "heart" of the problem: Mat 19:8 *Jesus said to them, It is because of your hardness of heart that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.*

d. ***unless the marriage is unlawful*** - ? The Greek word underlying

this phrase is *porneia*. Many translators simply render it adultery or fornication. This is the usual Protestant interpretation. Namely that Jesus allows divorce in the case of adultery. The ancient Catholic position is somewhat different, rendering *porneia* as incest. In other words Jesus refers to a marriage within forbidden blood lines. Jewish practice forbade marriage among siblings (same as today), first cousins (largely the same today) and even second cousins (usually not observed today). This interpretation became important as the Church encountered the Gentile world which had many strange and perverted marriage and sexual practices. In this historical context *porneia* came to mean any marriage forbidden or unlawful in the Judeo/Christian tradition. Hence our Catholic translation renders the word “unless the marriage is unlawful.

2. What then is Jesus teaching? For the Christian in a truly transformative union with Jesus Christ divorce is a foreign concept. As already stated, Jesus develops this more fully in Matt 19. Here are some excerpts: 19:3 *And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"* 4 *He answered, "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female,* 5 *and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?* 6 *So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder."*...*"Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.* 9 *I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."* God makes spouses one. It is a hard heart which divides. The transformative union to which we are summoned heals our heart and mind in such a way that we seek to overcome hurts, misunderstanding and resentments that can build in a marriage. We receive a forgiving and understanding heart, resentments die, compassion and love reign. This is the heart of Jesus in us, the same Jesus who loved us even when we did not love him, who forgave us even when we accused him falsely and tortured him.
3. The divorce rate is currently high among Christians. It must be granted that some Christians have been driven to divorce by an insistent spouse who brought great legal pressure. Not every divorced Christian went there willingly. Further, some have divorced as the result of distant personal struggles and other factors too numerous to detail here. Marriage issues can become very complicated! The point of this reflection is not to point accusing fingers but for spouses to gain a vision that transforms their thinking and behavior, for spouses to grow in a relationship with Jesus Christ that transforms their own spousal relationship. When Christ fully lives in both, divorce is unthinkable.

**D.** *33 Again you have heard that it was said to your ancestors, 'Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow.' 34 But I say to you, do not swear at all; not by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black. 37 Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.' Anything more is from the evil one.*

1. **Introductory point:** If we are interpreting the Sermon on the Mount merely as a new legislation we will tend to emphasize the first part: “do not swear at all.” We immediately get anxious since no civilization has existed without some oath taking. We have all taken oaths, it is a normal part of life. Even our signature on checks or legal documents amounts to a form of an oath. We shall see that Jesus was really addressing a somewhat different and more complex historical situation (see below) than an occasional oath of office or courtroom oath. Our vision of the Sermon on the Mount is not to see it as a new legalism (though it does have some prescriptions) but to emphasize the transformed life Jesus is describing. If we’re not careful we can miss the whole point: the transformed person is a man (woman) of his word, he/she has integrity, consistency and fidelity. They are trustworthy and dependable, and by extension prompt and punctual.
2. Historical background - The remote background of Jewish oath taking at the time of Jesus was the third commandment: Ex 20:7 *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.* At the heart of this commandment was never using God’s name to take a false oath. Over the centuries the Jews carefully avoided using God’s name (Yahweh) at all and certainly not swearing by it. Thus began a very legalistic system of swearing by the temple, earth, heaven etc. There came to be different levels of importance associated with various oath formulas. The Lord refers to this legalistic system in the text here: ***“do not swear... by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Do not swear by your head...”*** Elsewhere Jesus condemns the legalism of oaths: Mat 23:16 *"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If any one swears by the temple, it is nothing; but if any one swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.'...17 You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? 18 And you say, 'If any one swears by the altar, it is nothing; but if any one swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.' 19 You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? So he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by everything on it; and he who swears by the temple, swears by it and by him who dwells in it; 22 and he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.* Obviously the whole system

had become very legalistic and corrupt. Why should anyone at any time be able to swear in any way and not be obligated? Jesus dismisses the whole system and says, don't swear at all! Be a man of your word. Be a woman who means what she says and follows through.

3. This then leads to the positive vision and teaching we must emphasize: ***Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.' Anything more is from the evil one.*** In other words, the transformed person speaks the truth, is honest, frank and forthright, keeps his promises, does not play games with how she worded her promises. Jesus spoke the truth and was faithful to his word even at a high cost, his life. When he lives his life in us we will be the same. We will be committed to the truth, speak the truth, be faithful to our promises and commitments. In fact the deeper reality is that when Jesus lives his life in us we will become such a person of integrity that no one would dream of asking us to take an oath! Truth and integrity are of the Lord, anything less is from the devil.

**E.**     **38 You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'**  
**39 But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on (your) right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. 40 If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well. 41 Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow.**

1.     **Initial thought.** Behind this text is the gift of a generous heart. Ps 118:32 *In the ways of your precepts I run O Lord for you have enlarged my heart.* It takes a large heart not retaliate, to go the extra mile, to give alms. The transformed mind and heart which Jesus gives is like this. It is a large heart, able to endure personal slights, and attacks, to refuse to retaliate. A large heart that easily lets go of personal possessions in pursuit of a higher goal.
2.     There are surely many questions that arise out of these sayings of Jesus. Most of these questions emerge from seeing the Sermon as legal prescription rather than descriptive example. Nevertheless, these are important questions.
  - a.     What does it mean to offer no resistance to injury?
  - b.     Does this mean that there is no place for a criminal justice system?
  - c.     Should police forces be banned?
  - d.     Is there no place for national defense? An Armed Forces?
  - e.     Should all punishment be banned?
  - f.     Should bad behavior never be rebuked?
  - g.     Am I required to let go of anything anyone asks for?
  - h.     Do I always have to give away my money to beggars?
  - i.     Is it always wise to give someone whatever they ask for?
  - j.     Is it wise for me always to agree to help in every task that is asked of me?
  - k.     We can raise other questions in class.
3.     To answer some of these questions, it is well to recall that the Lord is speaking to us as individuals. Therefore, the State, which has an obligation to protect the innocent from foes within and without, may be required to use force to repel threats. Further, the State has an obligation to secure basic justice and may therefore be required to assign punishment for crime committed. This has been the traditional Christian position. (Pacifists however differ with the traditional approach) It will be noted that scripture does not condemn military service in any explicit sense. Nor does it deny the right of the State to confer punishment. Consider some of the following New Testament texts.
  - a.     Luke 3:14 *Soldiers also asked him (John the Baptist), "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Rob no one by violence*

*or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.*<sup>15</sup>

- b. Roman soldiers often interacted with Jesus, New Testament texts often mention them (Mat 8, 27, Mark 15, Luke 7, 23, Acts 10 *inter alia* ) In no place are they condemned or is their military service called into question.
- c. In John's gospel Jesus acknowledges Pilate's authority (even though he exercises it wrongly). *Pilate therefore said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin."* (Jn 19:11)
- d. Paul acknowledges the power and right of the state to punish criminals even with capital punishment: Rom13:1ff *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.<sup>6</sup> For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.*
- e. Hence the New Testament does seem to refer punitive powers to the state for the common good. Jesus speaks to us as individuals however and testifies that to the degree that we are transformed we will not seek to retaliate or avenge personal injuries. Rather, due to our relationship with God the Father we will be content to leave such matters to God. As scripture testifies: *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."* Rom 12:19

4. What about rebuking bad behavior? Here too scripture does not forbid but rather commands fraternal correction.

- a. James 5:19 My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.
- b. Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom,
- c. Lev 19:17 Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him.
- d. Ez 3:17 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you

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<sup>5</sup>Note JB does not condemn their military service or admonish them to leave the military

hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. 18 If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand

- e. Gal 5:25 "Brethren, if someone is detected in sin, you who live by the Spirit should gently set him right, each of you trying to avoid falling into temptation himself."
- f. The deeper question for us is this. Are we correcting out of love or to avenge ourselves. When we punish children, or criminals. What is the motive of our heart? Love or vengeance, pride or humility?

5. Some particular observations about the text:

- a. ***An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*** - this law (Lex Talionis) from Exodus 21:24ff was originally meant to limit retaliation to a proportionate response. Jesus asks us to go even further in our personal response. Mercy more than pure justice.
- b. ***But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil.*** - It is unlikely Jesus means that legitimate self-defense is forbidden. More surely what he means is that we should not retaliate or take vengeance. This is due to the fact that the lines that follow elucidate what he means in this line.
- c. ***When someone strikes you on (your) right cheek, turn the other one to him as well.*** - Being struck with the back of the hand was an ancient (even modern) sign of disrespect. But for a Christian in Christ, who can really dishonor me? Let it pass
- d. ***If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well.*** - It was forbidden to take the tunic of a person in pledge for a loan. Thus Jesus is using this as a symbol for our rights. There are some people who are forever standing on their rights to this or that. They clutch their privileges and will not let them go even if the common good would require it. They will militantly go to law rather than suffer any infringement upon them. The true Christian thinks more of duties than rights, more of responsibilities than privileges. All this personal honor stuff etc. is unimportant when Christ lives in us. There are some rights necessary for the completion of our duties or for meeting our basic needs. It is unlikely Jesus has this in mind to forbid.
- e. ***Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles.*** - it was legal for a Roman soldier to press a person into service for one mile to carry things etc. Here too, some might be bent out of shape over such indignities. Jesus counsels us to get over it. Jesus came as the servant of all and as one who served rather than be served. To the degree that he lives in us, we will willingly serve.
- f. ***Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow.*** - Here too many questions arise. We can discuss the issues related to indiscriminate giving in class but now let it suffice to say that when Jesus lives in us we will be more

generous. We will give cheerfully and assist others gladly.

6. Here then is a transformation of the mind and heart. We will view things differently. Not be so easily bent out of shape, retaliatory, vengeful. We will be more patient, more generous, less grasping, more giving. This is what happens when we live in a transformative relationship with Jesus.

**F. *43 You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same?***

1. Here is the acid test, the hallmark of a true Christian: the love of one's enemy. Note that Lord links this to being a true child of God. Why? Because God loves everyone and gives gifts of sun and rain to all. If then we are a chip off the old block, we will do the same. Anybody loves those who love them. But a Christian is fulfilling the Law and exceeding it. If Christ lives in us then we will love even our enemy. Recall that he loved us even when we hated him and killed him: *And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. (Luke 23:34) Further: While we were his enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son (Rom 5:10)*
2. We should be careful not to make love an abstraction. The Lord is talking about a real transformation of our hearts here. Sometimes we say things like, "You don't have to like everyone but you have to love them." This turns love into something of an abstraction. The Lord is talking about a deep love that wills good things for the enemy. And more than wills them, works toward that end. We are called to have a compassion, understanding, even affection for those who hate us and will us evil. God doesn't just love me he even likes me. We may wonder how this can happen in us. How can we have affection for those who hate us?! Yet it can be so when Christ lives his life in us. We will good and do good to them who hate us just as Jesus did.
3. It is also important not to sentimentalize this love. Jesus loved his enemies (us) but did not coddle us. He spoke the truth to the scribes and pharisees of his day often forcefully and uncompromisingly. We are called to a strong love which wants the truth for everyone. Yet this testimony is also given with understanding and true (not false) compassion.
4. Finally Jesus introduces a phrase that will be important in the next Chapter" "Your Heavenly Father" More will be said of this in notes to come. But here note that when Jesus lives his life in us our relationship to

the Heavenly Father becomes clearer and deeper. It becomes the fundamental relationship that underlies every decision and every other relationship in our life. When God is truly “your heavenly Father” we don’t need to please others, be applauded by them, seek revenge etc. It is enough that our Father sees. It is enough. More will be said of this in a few pages.

**G. 48 *So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.***

1. Well here is the fundamental summary: Godlike perfection! Nothing less will do. How could there be anything less when Christ lives his life in us? To the degree that he lives in us and the old Adam dies we become perfect. This is the lot of the Saints in Heaven: they have been made perfect. Christ’s work in them is complete. The Greek word here is *Telios* which means complete or perfect. The emphasis here is on the completion of a work in us more than a mere excellence in performance. Hence Paul writes to the Philippians: *And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.* (Phil 1:6)
2. This sentence also serves as an open-ended conclusion to the antitheses. Almost as if Jesus says, These have only been a few examples I have given you. The point is to be perfect, complete in every way, totally transformed in your mind, heart and behavior.

## V. The Three Basic Acts of (Jewish) Piety

- A. Chapter Six of the Sermon amounts to a commentary by Jesus on the three basic acts of Jewish Piety: Prayer, fasting and almsgiving. You Pray and so you are in touch with God. You fast and therefore you deprive yourself of things and then you can give alms because of the money you've saved. The order they're given in the text is different: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. Jesus does not merely comment however on these three basic acts of piety, he deepens them. Just as he has so far. Merely conforming to an external notion of these things and "behaving" in a certain way is not enough. The question again is one of interiority. What is really going on in your mind and heart regarding these matters? Do they actually put you in touch with God? Ok you're fasting. Why? Is it to conform to a fast day and win the approval of others or is it because you love God and fasting helps you love him more? So you are giving alms. Great. But why? For applause, approval? Or is it enough that God who sees in secret will see you secret deeds? So you pray. Do you pray to be seen by others and approved by them or do you pray to be in touch with God even when no one sees? Who God? Who is your Father. Whom do seek and to whom do you chose to relate in these matters: God or man?
- B. This leads us to another important discussion: the problem of hypocrisy.<sup>6</sup> Jesus uses the term a number of times here. When we use the word hypocrite we usually mean so one whose actions do not match their declared values, some one who says one thing and does another, some one who is strongly inconsistent. When it sticks, the charge is embarrassing and even devastating. In some ways it is one of the worst things you can say of some one. This is what we mean and what our experience of the word is. But the question before us is, Is this what Jesus means when he uses the word Hypocrite? As you might imagine, there is actually something richer going on in Jesus' declaration. The notion of saying one thing and doing another and of inconsistency is not wholly absent but something richer and ultimately more important is being indicated. A very deep and poignant problem is being diagnosed. A problem for which we should have some compassion, not the severe condemnation that usually accompanies our use of the word. The Greek Word: *Hypocritos* means simply actor. What does Jesus mean in calling some people actors (Hypocrites)? Fundamentally what a hypocrite is in Biblical terms is someone who is unable to appreciate who God really is and therefore is an actor. If we don't appreciate who God really is then what is our whole life really about? What happens is that we end up looking for some sort of navigational points (*i.e.* how are we doing) in our life from the reaction of those around us. We do what we do in order to provoke a good or acceptable response on their part. And so we are actors on a stage, looking for applause etc. The predominate mode of our activity is to situate ourselves well in the world of human being because we don't know that God is our Father. So the question is, Am I an actor on stage (hypocrite) looking for applause and the esteem of men or am I in living conscious contact with my heavenly Father and this is what governs

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<sup>6</sup>Thanks to Fr. Francis Martin for the valuable insights on this topic. From his taped commentary on Matthean Theology in the Sermon on the Mount.

my decisions and mode of living? So the topics before us (prayer fasting and almsgiving) Jesus uses as an example. He fundamental teaching is this: don't be an actor. Understand that you're relating to your heavenly Father when you pray, fast and give alms and it's knowing God that gives a substance to your life so that you're not an actor.

- C. This leads us to final introductory comment. The phrase, "your heavenly Father" is very precious. Yet it occurs nowhere else in Matthew or the other gospels.<sup>7</sup> Yet here the phrase occurs four times in a few verses. Note also that the word Father is used 17 times in the sermon. As we have already seen Jesus is doing more than talking about moral behavior, he is teaching of the critical importance of relating to God. We have emphasized this already in Chapter five in insisting that Jesus is describing by example a life that is transformed by our relating to Him and his indwelling us. Now the focus shifts but the principal is the same. Our relationship to our heavenly Father is what gives the fullest meaning to our actions. As we are transformed by our relationship to the Father what we do comes from very different motives. For example, our prayer fasting and almsgiving are not to impress man but to relate to and experience love with the Father. The sad truth for many, even practicing Christians is that God the Father is a stranger and so we become actors (hypocrites). Jesus by indwelling us wants to change this so that the Father is Abba and our whole manner of life shifts from acting before man to relating to God.
- D. With this introduction in mind we have established a foundation on which we can read this section of the Sermon
- E. **THE PRINCIPAL OF PIETY - 1** *"(But) take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father.*
1. Here is the principle which Jesus will illustrate with three examples: Almsgiving, Prayer and Fasting. This is a similar pattern that we saw in Chapter five wherein the Lord established the principle of fulfillment of the Law (exceeding) and then illustrated it with six antitheses examples.
  2. What then is the principle? When you perform acts of piety it is Your Heavenly Father to whom you are relating. The whole point of such things is to relate to *Him*. That others may or may not see us is beside the point. That others see us and give us credit for being pious is not why we should do such things. If this is why we do them we are actors (hypocrites) on a stage. We work for applause and popularity. Jesus teaches if that's what we want that's what we'll get and that's *all* we'll get. There will be no "recompense" (reward or recognition) from the Father. So if I work hard to be a nice guy, everyone will think I'm a nice guy. End of story. Now what? But that's the problem if I don't know God's my Father and I'm an

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<sup>7</sup>There are references to "the heavenly Father" and "my (*i.e.* Jesus') Father" But the teaching that he is your Father is unique to his section of Matthew.

actor.

3. Recompense?

a. The word means reward, repayment, or recognition. The Greek phrase behind this is *apecho misthos*. The Greek word *apechein* means, “paid off.” If you were in the market in a Greek speaking part of the Middle East at the time of Jesus and you are a merchant and some one pays you for goods you would hand him a receipt with the word: *apeche* - Paid in full. It’s over, it’s paid in full. So the notion here in the text is OK you’ve been paid. Ok everyone thinks you’re great, you’re popular and approved, you’ve been applauded and congratulated. Ok then, you’ve been paid in full. That’s it, contract over, that’s all you’re gonna get. That’s frightening! Imagine all that work, giving alms, fasting. Everyone claps and says great and God’s that’s it that’s all you get. Paid in full. If that’s what you want that’s all you get. You want recognition? Great you’ve got it! Paid in full. That’s frightening. But see what happens if we don’t know the Father? We work for man and man rewards. Paid in full. Now what have you got?

b. A Jewish Story about Abraham contains this notion (if you’re rewarded by man that’s all you get). Recall that Abraham had captured all that spoil in War and that Melchizedek paid him a tithe (Genesis 14 *inter al.*) And according to this story in the Targums, Abraham thought, “Uh oh, it may not be so good that I’m getting all this reward now. It might mean that my justice is really quite deficient and the Lord is rewarding me now cause I’m getting paid off now. But that’s all I get!” And Abraham got sacred, maybe this is all I get. And then an angel comforted him and said, “No that’s not true.” and he felt much better! But you see the notion. If you’re doing just nifty and the world is applauding and rewarding you, look out maybe it’s because that’s all you’re gonna get! Don’t live for that, relate to the Father.

4. Question - did not Jesus earlier say - “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*” (Mat 5:16) Yes he did. But here the emphasis is on the interior motivation of our deeds, not on our deeds themselves. Note that both texts emphasize “Your heavenly Father.” This is the point. With whom are you relating. Who is central? God, man or you? The point of external deeds is not applause for me, but that God my Father is glorified.

F. **ALMSGIVING - 2** *When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, 4 so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.*

1. Many have wondered, what did it mean to blow a trumpet? Was this actually done in a literal sense. Was there a large trumpet shaped drum to receive coins of alms? Probably not. It is more likely just a prophetically dramatic illustration of Jesus. In other words, don't hire a band to play as you write your check to Catholic Charities. Actors work for applause. But for you who are in living conscious contact with your heavenly Father don't need all this applause. It is enough that your Father sees. In fact you'd rather only he sees lest others reward you with praise and you might be repaid. If you want applause, fine that's what you get and all you get. Jesus advises, keep your deeds of mercy secret insofar as possible, then your reward is from God.
2. Question - who would you rather reward you - the Father or Man?
  - a. Really...?

G. **PRAYER - 5** *"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.*

1. Here too we have to understand that Jesus is not banning all public prayer. He went to the Synagogue<sup>8</sup> He was seen in prayer by others<sup>9</sup> and so forth. The point again is why do you pray? To relate to your heavenly Father or to be seen by others and be approved and applauded. Jesus is speaking about an interiority more than an external behavior.
2. Are you and actor looking for applause? Fine, it's yours. *Peche* - Paid in full, that's all you get. But if you pray even when no one knows but God, your reward is from God.
3. Which reward do you really want? Really...?

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<sup>8</sup>Luke 4:16 *And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read;*

<sup>9</sup>Cf Luke 11:1

H. THE LORD'S PRAYER - 7 *In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9 "This is how you are to pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread; 12 and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; 13 and do not subject us to the final test, but deliver us from the evil one.*

1. **Multiplying words?** It will be noted that when someone is a stranger we tend to multiply words. This is because we are nervous and so we chatter about the weather, dumb stuff etc. because we cannot bear the silence. But when we know someone well, even extended periods of silence are not uncommon or nerve-wracking. Further, we know when we have communicated with those we know. We don't have to keep repeating our self. This is likely what Jesus had in mind. If God is a stranger we multiply words and doubt we have been understood. But when we are in living conscious contact with God we are at peace. We don't have to nervously chatter and be superstitious, thinking only many words and proper incantations will satisfy. This does not mean we should not specifically make our needs known or not persist in prayer (which is different than chattering away). Persistence is elsewhere and consistently taught by Jesus as a norm for prayer: Lk 18:1ff; Lk 11:5ff; Mat 7:7.

2. This is how you are to pray.... It is not as though Jesus is teaching Say only these exact words. The words are precious but here again Jesus is trying to illustrate a deeper reality in us. He is illustrating by these words what ought to be going on in us interiorly, in our mind and heart as we pray: Here is what the mind and heart of a person of pray is like. The Lord's prayer suggests some basic qualities and dispositions of our spiritual life.

a. **RELATE - *Our Father in heaven***

(1) Here again is Jesus central point: Relate to the Father! When Jesus lives his life in us and His Spirit dwells in us we will experience God as our Father

(2) As developed in other texts, the deeper Christian word of Abba underlies the prayer. Abba is the family word for the more generic and formal word "father." Why the word Abba is not used here is uncertain.

(a) Rom 8:15 *For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, "Abba! Father!"*

(b) Gal 4:6 *And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"*

b. **REJOICE - *hallowed by thy name***

- (1) The praise and love of God is the foundation of our lives. He is the giver of every good and perfect gift and to Him our praise is due.
- (2) Praise and thanksgiving make us people of hope and joy.
- (3) It is for this that we were made: Eph 1:11 *In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory.*

c. **RECEIVE - *your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven***

- (1) At the heart of this petition is an openness to God's will, to his word of instruction, to his plan for us and for this world.
- (2) When Jesus lives in us we hunger for God's word and strive to know his will and have it operative in our life.
- (3) John 4:34 *"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."*

d. **REQUEST - *Give us today our daily bread***

- (1) Intercessory prayer is at the heart of the Christian life.
- (2) This prayer flows from our love and solidarity with others. We see the World with the compassion of Christ and pray.

e. **REPENT - *and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; 13 and do not subject us to the final test, but deliver us from the evil one.***

- (1) Debts? - historically this is how a Semite spoke of sin. Hence financial obligations are not meant here, rather the debt of sin.
- (2) Sin is understood at two levels here:
  - (a) sin - our personal sins and transgressions, referred to here as our debts.
  - (b) Sin (capital S) - the whole climate of sin, the structures of sin that reinforce and underlie our own sins. Referred to here as the test, and the evil one.
    - i) Eph 6:12 *For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God,*
  - (c) We can discuss more of these concepts in class.

I. **WARNING - 14 *If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly***

***Father will forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions.***

1. We have already discussed the danger of the refusal to forgive under the beatitude “Blessed are the Merciful...” In many ways Scripture shows how a lack of mercy, an unforgiving attitude is a slippery path to hell.
  - a. *Mat 18:32 Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."*
  - b. *Luke 6:37 forgive, and you will be forgiven;*
  - c. *James 2:13 For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy; yet mercy triumphs over judgment.*
2. We have a lot to say about the standard by which we shall be judged. We choose the standard by the standard we use for others!
3. To the degree that Jesus lives in us and we are in a real relationship with the Father of Mercy, how can we fail to forgive. Mercy is the fruit of a true relationship with the God of all mercy.

**J. *16 "When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. 17 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.***

1. The Same Principles apply here as above

K. ***Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.***

1. This saying extends the question of motivation. Is our treasure really God and the good things he has in store for us in heaven or are we more interested in the applause and approval of human beings? What and who do we really value? Whatever the praise of humanity we acquire it will pass away. Who was last year's Miss America? Who won the super bowl in 1984, who was most valuable player of that Game? Who was voted most likely to succeed in your High School Class? How has that designation benefitted them? Who won the Oscar for best Actor in 1973? 1 Cor 9:25 *Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.....* The praise of man withers and fades. God's rewards last forever. But none of this makes sense if God is a stranger. If we let him be distant and aloof from us these rewards are even more distant and aloof. It comes back to this, are you relating to God the Father in such a way that his rewards are something more than abstract?
2. Our heart is with what we really value. Where and what is your treasure? Many people are lukewarm about God and heaven. Their heart is just not in it. This is because they value the applause of man and the rewards of earth more than heaven. Where are you and I? What do we really value? (Hint consider where you spend your money and time)

L. ***FIX YOUR FOCUS - 22 "The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light; 23 but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be in darkness. And if the light in you is darkness, how great will the darkness be.***

1. A difficult saying. The ancient Jews however had a notion that the eye was a window to the soul. A sound eye indicated a sound soul. We have something of this notion still in that we respect and trust a person who is able to look us in the eye. But a person whose glance is shifty seems less trustworthy. The ancient Jews took this a bit further. One of the accepted connections was that a generous person had a good (or simple) eye. A generous person would not hesitate to look at people because they were not afraid to be approached. Compare this to our possible tendency to refuse to look at beggars. If our eyes meet, they might ask! So we don't look directly at them. But if we are in a willing mood we are less afraid to look. So then, this saying is linked to the one before it about generosity and not storing up earthly treasure. There are other places in the Old Testament where generosity is linked to having a good (or simple) eye
  - a. Prov 22:9 *He who has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor.*
  - b. Deut 15:9 *Take heed lest ...your eye be hostile to your poor*

*brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the LORD against you, and it be sin in you.*

- c. *1 Sam 2:29 Why then look with greedy eye at my sacrifices and my offerings which I commanded, and honor your sons above me by fattening yourselves upon the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?'*

2. In an extended pastoral sense we can also learn that our minds are like a sponge. If you put a sponge in muddy water it comes out dirty. Thus if we focus our attention on negative, sinful or harmful things, our mind becomes filled with these things. If the moral and spiritual vision we live by is rooted in darkness and sin, how deep the darkness is!
3. But if we set our mind and heart on the things of God and heaven (as said above) then our mind and heart are filled with the things of God and our whole life is filled with light.

M. TRUST - THE FRUIT OF A TRUE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER - 24  
*"No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. 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 clothing? 26 Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? 27 Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span? 28 Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin. 29 But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. 30 If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? 31 So do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear?' 32 All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom (of God) and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. 34 Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil.*

1. Two masters? - We can choose to serve and relate to the Father. Or we can choose to serve and relate to the world. We cannot serve both.
2. But which choice we have made will be manifest by, among other things, anxiety. Why? Because the world places before us many anxious matters:
  - a. Food, water, shelter, yes.
  - b. But also deeper matters:
    - (1) Popularity
    - (2) Prestige
    - (3) Acceptance
    - (4) Control and power
    - (5) The world makes us anxious saying, You haven't lived or "made it" unless
      - (a) You live in this neighborhood
      - (b) Have this kind of house
      - (c) Drive this kind of car
      - (d) Have a perfect body
      - (e) Have this kind of job/income
      - (f) Take this cruise, use this product...
    - (6) The world imposes it's anxieties. To the degree that they are in us is a sign that we are serving the world.
3. What is the solution to all this anxiety? **Your heavenly Father** . To the degree that we are in a living, vital and transformative relationship with Jesus, and through him, the Father, worldly anxieties diminish and are reduced to nothing. When Jesus lives in us we will seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. Note that, as we have seen, this is far more than some intellectual acceptance of the existence of heaven and God.

Seeking first the Kingdom is rooted in a transformation of the entire person: mind, heart, soul, spirit, intellect, will, body. When this transformation of the whole person is underway anxieties diminish in some of the following ways.

- a. Our mind and heart are transformed.
  - (1) The way we think begins to change. What used to upset us no longer does. Obsessions with the preoccupations of the world (Listed above) diminish. We need less stuff, less acceptance. Less power and ego boosts. Not having such things that the world says we should, causes us no anxiety.
- b. Our Priorities begin to change.
  - (1) We're just not as interested in the things the world says we should be. We don't need or want all the latest fashions, trinkets, "necessities" etc. We rather pray or go to Bible Study than see the latest TV show on the latest wide screen, high definition, wall mounted, plasma screen. We won't die if we don't get the promotion or the raise. It's OK if my car is just ordinary and my body isn't the perfect weight and shape. I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold. Since it's OK, I'm not so anxious about not meeting all the world's goals. I have other, greater goals such as knowing my Father and setting my sights on heaven.
- c. Our trust is enhanced because we know the Father. What ever happens, we know it is working for our good.
  - (1) Romans 8:28 *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*
  - (2) Rom 8:35 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*
  - (3) Now this confidence is not some abstraction. It is the result of living, conscious contact with Jesus. Thus we trust the Father's love for us.

4. Again, the emphasis and root of the trust described here is the transformed human person. Here is described a person whose whole center has shifted from the world and it's demands to God the Father and his offer of freedom and salvation. The complexities, demands, and priorities of the world just aren't on the radar for a transformed person. God the Father and his Kingdom are the focus. If there is anxiety, it is anxiety of losing sight of these through sin. *Deliver us O Lord from every evil, and grant us peace in our day. In your mercy keep us free from sin and protect us from all anxiety as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus*

*Christ.*

VI. Chapter 7 - Standards of Judgement

A. TEACHING ON PERSONAL JUDGEMENT - *1 "Stop judging, that you may not be judged. 2 For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you. 3 Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove that splinter from your eye,' while the wooden beam is in your eye? 5 You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye.*

1. These verses could be regarded as good, practical advice that could be given by any one. For example, be nice to other people if you want them to be nice to you. Don't be harsh in your assessments of others if you don't want them to be harsh to you....etc. But remember our context here. Jesus is describing the transformed person, a person who is in living conscious contact with God and is being transformed in this relationship. Hence what is described here is more than external conformity to certain norms. What is described here includes a interior transformation of the mind and heart of a disciple. Thus in our relationships to others we are profoundly transformed. Thus, in our mind and heart (no just in our external behavior) we are no longer harsh and rash in our judgments, we are compassionate and merciful. Why? Because Christ lives in us and we know the Father and his mercy for us. We know of his patience and have experienced his mercy. Deeply rooted in this experience, we are able to share what we have received with others. Further, when Christ lives in us through his Holy Spirit we see more and more as he sees, with compassion, the same compassion he showed us from the Cross: *Father forgive them, they know not what they do.*<sup>10</sup>
2. What does it mean to judge? Perhaps we should begin by excluding a distorted notion. In modern times many have taken this phrase to mean that a Christian should have no opinion about right and wrong. "After all,, who am I to say? I don't want to be judgmental!" The voice of the world frequently condemns Christians for being "judgmental" because we have a concept of sin and speak of it from our pulpits and in our biblical teaching. Somehow, to the world, having a concept of right and wrong is judgmental.<sup>11</sup> This is an extreme and improper interpretation of what Christ teaches here, if it is what a standard that Jesus himself repeatedly violated. Jesus spoke openly of sin and condemned it. He called us to

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10N.B. This does not mean we never note the reality of sin and seek to correct the sinner. As we shall see, this is commanded and commended in other places in the Scripture. Note too, Jesus, who is compassion itself, loved us enough to confront us with the reality of our sins.

11It is a humorous paradox that in telling us we should not be clear about right and wrong, the world is judging us: we are wrong and the world is right! But I thought it was wrong to judge?!

repentance (Mat 4:17; 11:20; Mk 1:15; Lk 13:5; *inter al.*) He warned of hell ( Mt 5:22, 28-29; Mat 23:33 *inter al.* and as we shall see in just a few verses). He embraced sinners but told them not to sin (eg Jn 8:11; Jn 5:14; *inter al.*). And so forth. Hence, the teaching not to judge does not *per se* exclude the concept that there is sin, right and wrong etc. Further it does not exclude the correction of sinner. This is all clear from the example of Jesus himself. Further there are other New Testament texts that command or commend correction of the sinner:

- a. James 5:19 My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.
- b. Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom,
- c. Lev 19:17 Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.
- d. Ez 3:17 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. 18 If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand
- e. Gal 5:25 "Brethren, if someone is detected in sin, you who live by the Spirit should gently set him right, each of you trying to avoid falling into temptation himself.
- f. Titus 1:9 [A Bishop] must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. For there are many rebellious people, empty talkers and deceivers.

3. What then does Jesus teach here? Again we must emphasize an interior notion. Fundamentally he teaches that we are to have a deep reverence for every one we encounter and never consider them to be a total loss, or beyond God's grace or mercy. Further that we are to have a compassion and patience for the struggles and confusion of others knowing that we too have our own struggles. We are keenly aware that God has enormous patience and mercy for us, thus we should have it for others. We speak the truth to each other but in love and with understanding. There is absolutely no place for harsh anger or arrogance. All of us are far from the perfection of the Father and will only make it with a lot of grace and mercy. We are called to correct each other and speak the truth but the Lord excludes certain dispositions as we do so. For example, there are incorrect ways to correct.

- a. We can correct a sinner arrogantly as though we were above reproach or some how better. Jesus refutes this with the humorous example of the guy with a 2x4 coming out of his eye noticing a speck in his brother's eye. Pride is the fundamental sin that underlies every other sin we commit. Hence, pride is the 2x4 and every other sin is merely saw dust, offspring of the root sin. To correct with pride involves a bizarre distortion. Physician heal thyself! Notice too the use of the word hypocrite. Recall what we have said. A hypocrite is an actor. Someone who is reduced to posturing before others because they do not know the Father. Here the context is that I think I'm better than you. I have a starring role. You have merely a cameo appearance. I can only think like this

and compete like this if I don't know the Father. So I'm reduced to being an actor, pretending I'm better, more approved, and thinking this will actually get me somewhere. Ultimately we cannot judge ourselves better (or worse) than others since we see only the surface, only imperfectly.

(1) 1 Sam 16:7 *for the LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."*

(2) 1 Cor 4:3 *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God.*

- b. We can correct with excessive anger or harshness. It is easy to be angry with others especially when they sin. But this excessive anger and harshness usually flow from a lack of compassion and understanding. It also flows from a lack of appreciation of the mercy and compassion we have been shown and continue to need from God. Jesus warns of this attitude when he says *For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you.* If you want to be harsh, careful, you will be judged by the harshest standard when God shall judge you. In other words, think it through, the only way you're gonna make it is with a lot of grace and mercy. Since you depend on this doesn't it make sense to choose such a standard? How can I be so harsh when Christ, who died for sinners, lives in me?

**B. 6 "Do not give what is holy to dogs, or throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot, and turn and tear you to pieces.**

1. This seems a harsh saying and seems to require the very judgement the Lord condemns just one verse ago! "I have pearls of wisdom but cannot share them with you for you are a dog and/or a pig."
2. This was a Jewish saying that was rooted in tradition.
  - a. Some of the meat that had been sacrificed in the temple could be eaten by humans, especially the Levites. But in no way was it ever to be thrown to dogs or other animals to eat. If it was not eaten by humans it was to be burned. Hence holy and sanctified meat was not to be thrown to dogs because it was holy.
  - b. Pearls - this was an image for wisdom in the Old Testament. Pigs valued nothing they could not eat. Pearls could not be eaten, thus pigs simply would trample them underfoot.
3. So what is being said? Sacred matters, sacred things, wisdom and participation in sacred things should not be offered to those who are incapable of appreciating them. There are those who despise what we call

sacred. There is little that can be done in such cases except deny them the pleasure of tearing holy things apart or trampling them underfoot. Further, there are some who though not hostile, are ignorant of sacred realities. They should be taught and then admitted to sacred rites or further instructed on deeper mysteries. (Most of us experience a growth in our appreciation of sacred realities as our faith deepens).

4. Note also this saying is meant by Jesus to balance the statement that goes before. Granted we are not to sit in final judgement over others or pass harsh sentences on them but was *are* required to make distinctions. There is a proper caution to exercise in our assessment of others. Some people are harmful, even dangerous to us. We do well to acknowledge this and avoid them where possible and necessary.
  - a. 1 Cor 15:33 *Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." Come to your right mind, and sin no more. For some have no knowledge of God.*
  - b. Mat 7:15 *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves. By their fruits you will know them.*
  - c. Eph 5:6 *the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not associate with them,*
5. It is true, Jesus associated with sinners and spoke to them but we must be careful. We are not as sinless and beyond reproach as is Jesus. We can easily be drawn into sin with others. We must be careful, discerning and humble enough to admit that there are just some people who have too much power over us and can lead us to sin. We do well to discern this and avoid their company.

C. **TEACHING ON PRAYER - 7 *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 Which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf of bread, 10 or a snake when he asks for a fish? 11 If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him.***

1. Here too note that the background for this text is that you are in relationship with “your heavenly Father.” This should elicit a confidence in our prayer. Jesus has already said above that we don’t need lengthy repetitions, multiplied words and incantations. Our Father knows what we need. At the heart of this teaching is that we have a loving Father who wants to bless us.
2. While Jesus has earlier rejected mindless or excessive repetition note that the images above do commend persistence. We discussed this above. Here note that knocking and seeking both involve a built in persistence.
3. There are questions that arise here. I asked you may say but didn’t get it! Here as in other places we cannot expect one line of the bible to be the whole Bible. There are other teachings on prayer that qualify and distinguish what is said here. The emphasis Jesus makes here is on the goodness of your heavenly Father. But as we all know, good parents do not give their children anything they want. (“Daddy, can I have a machine gun and some explosives for my Birthday? I prefer C-4”) Good parents know when to say no. Sometimes we don’t know, or appreciate all the implications of what we ask. Below are some teachings on prayer that help flesh out a fuller biblical teaching:
  - a. Sometimes our sins hinder our prayers:
    - (1) *Prov 15:29 The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.*
    - (2) *Psalm 66:18 If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:*
    - (3) *Is 59:1 Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: 2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.*
    - (4) *Mal 2:13 And this again you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand. You ask, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Has not the*

*one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life? And what does he desire? Godly offspring. So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth.*

b. Sometimes we are not blessed because we are poor stewards of the gifts we have already received

(1) *Luke 16:10 He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?*

c. Sometimes God says know, but he helps us understand why:

(1) *2 Cor 12:7 And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses,*

(2) *Mark 10:35 And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him, and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."*

d. Some of our prayers ask God to take sides or come from bad motives:

(1) *Luke 12:13 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*

- e. The Phrase, “in the Name of Jesus” means something.
  - (1) Jesus taught in numerous places that we should ask in his name<sup>12</sup>
  - (2) Yet some treat this a mere incantation.
  - (3) To ask in the name of someone or to act in their name means that they have been consulted. If I speak in someone’s name I darn well better have checked it out with them. Thus to ask in the name of Jesus involves discernment and prayer with Jesus.

D. **THE GOLDEN RULE - 12 *Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets.***

- 1. At one level this could seem like just good advice that any one could give: be nice to people if you want them to be nice to you.
- 2. But recall our context: the Lord is describing the transformed person in whom he (Jesus) lives through his Holy Spirit. This transformed human person is in a life changing transformative relationship with the Father. Here then is the context for understanding this verse: it is more than advice, it is the very life of God in us reaching out to others, loving them as manifest through respectful and loving behavior.
- 3. Note how the love of God and the love of neighbor are linked elsewhere in scripture:
  - a. Matt 22:36 *"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."*
  - b. Note the link: when you love God with all your heart, of course you love your neighbor as yourself. This is what God’s love does, it equips us to love others in the way God loves them.
- 4. It is this context that elevates this verse to something more than cheap advice or just a familiar slogan.

E. There next follow a series of two’s:

- 1. Two destinations to choose
- 2. Two sorts of prophets
- 3. Two kinds of disciples
- 4. Two ways to respond to this sermon

F. ***13 Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. 14 How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few...21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of***

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<sup>12</sup>e.g. John 14:13 Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it.

*heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not drive out demons in your name? Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?' 23 Then I will declare to them solemnly, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.'*

1. Here is a call to sobriety. We are often convinced today that just about everyone goes to heaven. Our funerals are dominated by pronouncements “he is in a better place.” “She’s in heaven now” Salvation is basically a done deal and just about everyone is homeward bound.
2. But Jesus gives a very sobering teaching about a narrow gate and that few find their way to eternal life.
3. Here too we must appreciate the connection to our relationship with the Heavenly Father. God our Father deeply respects the freedom he has given us. We are freely invited, not forced, to love him and entering into a life changing, transformative relationship with him. The sad truth is that many simply do not want this relationship. In particular it’s the “life changing” and “transformative” aspects that are resisted. God respects our choices. If there is an explanation for hell it is one word: respect. It is a sad and poignant truth Jesus teaches that most simply don’t want God in control. They’d rather call the shots, decide what is right and wrong, set their own rules and pace. etc. Evidently there are more of such folks than we’d like to think. Sloth<sup>13</sup> is a very tragic and common state in the human person :-(
4. Note the final line of this section: *I never knew you*. There was an invitation to relationship, to *know*<sup>14</sup> the Lord. But it was rejected. God will not force us to get to know him. Note they knew about Jesus but they did not *know* him.
  - a. 2 Tim 2:11 *The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful -- for he cannot deny himself.*
5. We have discussed remnant theology before and must do so again in class.
6. How should we receive such a teaching? Depression and fright are

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<sup>13</sup>Sloth is defined as a sorrow, or sadness, or aversion, or even anger at the good things God wants to do for us.

<sup>14</sup>In the Bible “Know” is never merely an intellectual grasping of something or someone. Rather the word bespeaks an intimate, personal experience of the thing or person. Know is sometimes even used as a euphemism for sexual intercourse as in Gen 4:1 *Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD."*

unhelpful ways to receive it. However, a sober appreciation of seems best. What are some dimensions of sober thinking in this regard.

a. First, we should earnestly strive to journey the path of life realizing that we have strongly sinful drives that must be taken seriously or they can kill us eternally. Taking sin seriously and bringing it before the Lord for mercy and healing is essential.

(1) Phil 2:12 *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling<sup>15</sup>; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,*

(2) 1 Cor 9:25 *Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. holding fast the word of life.*

b. We should beg God for a hunger and thirst to relate to him since sloth is very strong. Our flesh doesn't want to have a thing to do with God and resists him mightily. We need to beg for God's Spirit to touch our spirit with a joy, excitement and thirst for the things of God. Note again how we are asking for a transformation of our inner self.

c. We should take seriously the need both to preach the Gospel and to correct the sinner. We are not equally required to preach and correct everyone we meet but surely our children and family members are required objects of our preaching and correcting. Further, we should support the efforts of those in the Church who publically preach. We should support and encourage them in their work for it is essential to the salvation of souls.

(1) Ez 3:17 *Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you will have saved your life.*

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<sup>15</sup>Here note that the fear and trembling need not be toward God but rather toward our own insane tendency to do things which we know are wrong and harmful. We have a fear of, that is take seriously, our strong desire to sin and seek for the medicine of grace to set us free.

d. We should pray for those who have died.

G. ***15 Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves. 16 By their fruits you will know them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? 17 Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 So by their fruits you will know them.***

1. Note first of all that this passage requires of us a judgement. As we discussed above the Lord's prescription at the beginning of this chapter that we not judge cannot be taken as an absolute prohibition of all discernment or judgement. This cannot be so. If this were so, then the Lord is teaching us to violate then principle he himself set forth just a few verses ago. As we can see here, all forms of judgement are not forbidden. Rather, the judgement of condemnation (so and so it in hell or on their way there) is forbidden. Likewise we cannot judge the relative worth of someone (I am better than you or *vice versa*). Further we are not able to judge fully the inner motivations of others. But here note we are *required* to judge the behavior of others and draw conclusions as to their message.
2. What is a false prophet? It is some one who does not teach God's will nd does not teach God's plan for his people. He teaches his own ideas. He is not sent by God. Therefore what he teaches is false. It is most frequent that false prophets fail to mention the cross or sin. Conversion is not mentioned or at best is muted.
  - a. Jer 14:13 *Then I said: "Ah, Lord GOD, behold, the prophets say to them, 'You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.'" And the LORD said to me: "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name; I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds. Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who prophesy in my name although I did not send them, and who say, 'Sword and famine shall not come on this land': By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed. And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem, victims of famine and sword, with none to bury them -- them, their wives, their sons, and their daughters.*
  - b. 2 Tim 4:2 *Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.*

3. They come looking like sheep and they're usually pretty popular. Plesantry is popular, the cross and calls for conversion are not.
4. How will we recognize them? Beyond the incomplete or erroneous proclamation the Lord tells us we can recognize them by the life they live.
  - a. Prophet for us today more often than not means a rebel, a prophetic figure who angrily denounces the status quo. But you have to watch. Not every rebel, every disturber is a prophet. There are many who are just angry. The difference between a prophet and an angry person is broken heart. A prophet's heart has been broken and he loves God's people. He preaches because he loves God's people, not because he wants to get something off his chest. And that makes a difference.
  - b. The Lord gives very practical advice: look at their lives. You will be able to tell them by their fruits. If my word is alive in them and burning in them their life will show it. Their not going to be interested in money and power, they're going to love my people. Look at someone like Mother Theresa. Is she a prophet. She hasn't made any money of it. She clearly loves God's people. She speaks up and says the truth whether people like to hear it or not. She's popular yes but not in a sold out way. Some years ago she spoke at Georgetown University. All the students wow this is great Mother Theresa! They flocked to hear her. She talked about serving the poor and they all applauded. And then she got on premarital chastity and they said, poor old woman she's out of touch, out of date. Now if she were trying to be popular and just wear sheep's clothing she wouldn't have said that. But she could not leave them without telling them the truth about the unchastity in their lives. She loved them too much to not speak about something that's devastating them. Now that's different than some one who's just interested in law and moral order and who shouts and screams. It's also different than someone just seeking to win a popularity contest. The point is love. If you don't love them you won't tell them what they need to hear, or you'll yell and scream.

Call to respond

H. ***24 Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. 25 The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. 26 And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. 27 The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined.***

1. Now that the teaching is given, how do we respond? It is possible to entertained by sermon. It is possible to informed. But are we transformed? How do we respond to what is taught here? Are we merely in the amen

- corner or will our life be changed by these words?
2. The choice is ours.
    - a. We can be transformed by the Spirit of Christ living in us
    - b. We can stop being actors and begin truly relating to our heavenly Father.
    - c. We can become the very holiness of God
    - d. We can be prepared when the floods and wind (our death) comes.
    - e. Or we can woefully unprepared and see our house (our soul) collapse and ruined.
  3. Now it's our turn. Jesus has preached. How do we respond?
  4. Note too the authority implicit in the argument: whoever hears my words and acts on them is the one that will last and the one who hears my words and does not act on them will not last. "Look," he says, "I'm telling you the way to life, this is not a joke." "This is not just good advice that any one could give it is my teaching and I am teaching you the way to life because I died to give it to you."

I. ***28 When Jesus finished these words, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, 29 for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.***

1. The scribes quoted each other and other experts. But Jesus spoke on his own authority. It is not enough even to quote the Bible, we have to know what we're talking about. Note the word "author" in authority. Jesus showed himself to be the author, the Word made flesh.
2. Here again, this is not just sage advice, it is the authoritative teaching of the Son of God. The crowds who heard him were struck by his authority. Are you and I? Are we astonished? Astonished enough to take this word seriously and let our lives be transformed?