



The Sermon on the Mount

	Title	Passage	Sermon	Study
1	King, Kingdom & Priests	Study 1: Matthew 5:1-16	Jan 31	Feb 1-7
2	Perfect obedience	Study 2: Matthew 5:17-48	Feb 7	Feb 8-14
3	The difficulty of divorce	Study 3: Matthew 5:31-32	Feb 14	Feb 15-21
4	No room for hypocrisy #1	Study 4: Matthew 6:1-4	Feb 21	Feb 22-28
5	No room for hypocrisy #2	Study 5: Matthew 6:5-18	Feb 28	Mar 1-7
6	Watch where you're going	Study 6: Matthew 6:19-24	Mar 7	Mar 8-14
7	Don't worry about your life	Study 7: Matthew 6:25-34	Mar 14	Mar 15-21
8	Live for the Kingdom	Study 8: Matthew 7:1-29	Mar 21	Mar 22-28

Impoverished... not perfected

As I've been reading through the sermon on the mount over the last few months, it's struck me that the words in this part of scripture are God's wisdom for life. The Book of Proverbs holds a high place for wisdom. Wisdom seems to be the knowledge of how to live a life that's pleasing to God—or how to live in a way that maximizes our created potential. Foolishness is to not live God's way. Wisdom is living God's way—the best way. Proverbs says:

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" **Proverbs 9:10a**

Basically, you're not going to understand the importance of living God's way until you understand **Him**, relative to *you*. Once you understand God's majesty, his perfection and his divine power, only then will you begin to tread carefully on his path and fear straying to the right or the left. Only then, as you tread fearfully, will you know that you are entirely dependent upon his mercy and his grace.

The beatitudes paint a picture of someone who rightly fears the Lord— it says blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek etc. (Matthew 5:3-10). These people get it. They get where they stand in relation to God. They understand their Father in heaven is perfect and they want to be perfect, as he is, but realise they can never nail it, they are entirely dependent upon his mercy and his grace.

The description of the blessed ones in the beatitudes is encapsulated by the little children in Matthew 19:14; they are entirely dependent. Jesus says the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. This idea that the kingdom of heaven belongs to the spiritually impoverished was difficult for Jesus' disciples to get their heads around. They seemed to think the kingdom of heaven belonged to the spiritually proud, like the Pharisees in Matthew 19 (see particularly verse 10), or the rich young ruler in Matthew 19 (see particularly verse 25). But Jesus made it clear that obtaining the level of righteousness required to enter the kingdom of heaven was out of reach, declaring that, 'with man, this is impossible'. It would only be God himself who could give anyone access to the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:26). In order for the kingdom of heaven to belong to you, you have to be like a little child; you have to be poor in spirit, dependent upon his mercy and his grace. Jesus came for such as these, not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).

When we read the Sermon on the Mount it ought to cause us to raise our hands to our Father in heaven to receive his mercy and his grace, like a little child, knowing we receive it in Christ. But, as we understand our dependence upon his mercy and his grace, we ought to be compelled to live his way. We ought to approach the Sermon on the Mount as wisdom for life, given by God to his children that we might have the life he made us for. We should never approach the Sermon on the Mount as a checklist to tick off causing pride to well up in our hearts or causing us to look down on others. Instead, poor, meek, mourning—yet rejoicing in Christ— we ought to approach it as our Father in heaven's graciously given wisdom for life.

This part of God's word is a humbling spiritual journey. But my prayer is it will also be a blessed one for us as our Father in heaven lovingly shapes us through his word into the likeness of his Son—the King of the kingdom who belongs to us, through him.

1

King, Kingdom and Priests

Warm-up

How would you describe what a really good Christian looks like?

Investigate

Read Matthew 5:1-12

1. Jesus is preaching good news to the poor here. He is proclaiming blessing for the broken hearted and promising comfort for those who mourn. This was precisely the kind of thing that Isaiah the prophet said that the Messiah (God's forever King) would do when he came to bring in the Kingdom of God (have a look at Isaiah 61:1-3). By preaching good news for the poor, blessing for the broken hearted and promising comfort to those who mourn, who do you think Jesus is claiming to be?

2. Who are the 'poor in spirit' who receive the blessing of the kingdom of heaven (see Psalm 40:17, Proverbs 16:19)?

3. What kind of mourning do you think v 4 is talking about (see psalm 119:136; and psalm 51:17)?

4. Being meek (v 5), is different to recognising your own spiritual bankruptcy. It has to do with how we relate to others when they call out our spiritual bankruptcy. How might a meek person respond when called out on his/her spiritual bankruptcy?

5. Being a peacemaker is not simply being 'peaceful'. How do Isaiah 9:6-7 and Isaiah 52:7 help us to understand what it means to be a peacemaker?

6. On what grounds may the people of God be blessed for facing persecution according to v 10 and 11?

7. All of these blessings belong to the people of God courtesy of the work of the suffering Messiah. Describe, in your own words, the character of the kind of person who belongs to the kingdom of heaven.

Read Matthew 5:13-16

8. After proclaiming the kingdom of heaven and the character of those who belong to it, Jesus reminds his followers of their role in the world. What role are the people of God called to?

9. According to the beatitudes, what kind of character should we pursue in order to be 'salt' and 'light'?

Apply

Jesus' teaching in the gospels sits in a strange place between the New Testament and the Old Testament. Here, as God's Messiah/King, he's calling out a new people of God - a new kingdom of priests. But he's calling them out as the suffering Messiah who must be pierced for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. It will be him, not our character, that will bring in the kingdom and the blessings of the beatitudes. But here we can see, as followers of Jesus, the life we are called to live as the saved people of God. This is the life we were made for.

10. Consider the character traits of the blessed:

Poor in spirit

Mourning

Meek

Desiring of righteousness

Merciful

Pure hearted

Peacemakers

Persecuted because of righteousness/Jesus

What do you need to work on here? How could you work on it?

11. As you consider the day you have in store tomorrow, what specific character traits (see above) could you work on in order to be salt and light to the people you are going to encounter?

Pray

2

Perfect obedience

Warm-up

Last term we looked at the Ten Commandments. Which one did you find the easiest to keep?

Investigate

Read Matthew 5:17-20

1. What does Jesus mean when he says he has not come to abolish but to 'fulfil' the Law and the Prophets (by the Law and the Prophets, Jesus means our Old Testament scriptures, likewise in the next verse, when he says 'the Law', he means the same thing)? Consider passages like Isaiah 61:1-3 that we looked at last week.

2. If Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament, what will it look like to practise and teach the commandments of the Old Testament as v 19 urges us?

3. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were quite good at obeying the commandments—they even had additional commandments that they imposed and tried to keep. They were good at obedience... but, it seems here, they were not good enough. What is the minimum level of righteousness Jesus says we must obtain to enter the kingdom of heaven (see Matthew 5:48)?

4. How is it be possible for any of us to fulfil the righteous requirements of the Old Testament?

Read Matthew 5:21-30

5. Explain how Jesus deepens and broadens the commands 'Do not murder' and 'Do not commit adultery' - i.e. what does keeping them involve?

Read Matthew 5:33-42

6. These two sections deal with faithfulness and justice. What kind of faithfulness and justice does Jesus call his followers to?

Read Matthew 5:43-48

7. How would you describe the kind of love Jesus is calling his followers to here?

8. We learnt in Matthew 5:19 that the greatest in the kingdom of heaven will be the one who teaches these commands and puts them into practice. Now that we know the kind of obedience the commands are calling us to, who can we say, with confidence, will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

Read Isaiah 53:1-6

9. Jesus has taught two main things in this part of the Sermon on the Mount. Firstly, that he has come to 'fulfil' the Old Testament, not abolish it. And secondly, that the obedience the Lord calls for is nothing short of perfection. How does this Isaiah passage help us to understand how we can be imperfect, not abolish the Old Testament, yet still be part of the kingdom of heaven?

Apply

10. Why do you think Christians sometimes feel like we deserve our place in heaven more than others? What can we do to stop ourselves from thinking like that?

11. What is an area of your life from this passage you can focus on changing in order to look more like Christ?

12. What are some ways we can help each other to be more Christ-like in our obedience?

Pray

3

The difficulty of divorce

Warm-up

How do you think the church has handled the issue of divorce over the last century?

Investigate

Read Deuteronomy 24:1-4

1. What does the passage tell us about the place of divorce in the Old Testament?

Read Matthew 5:31-32

2. Jesus seems to take a much sterner stance on divorce than the Old Testament passage above that he quotes from does. He does this exact same thing with murder in 5:22 and adultery in 5:28. What level of obedience is Jesus calling for here for entry to the kingdom of heaven?

3. How is it possible that someone who has either divorced or married a divorcee could be part of the kingdom of heaven?

4. Why do you think the church has been quite lenient on people who have been angry toward their brothers (v 22) or who have looked at someone lustfully (v28) on the one hand, but on the other hand have ostracised those who have been through divorce?

5. Jesus gives an 'exception' here to his sterner version of divorce obedience. What is the exception? Why do you think Jesus allows for this exception with divorce, given that he is in the midst of calling for so much 'next-level' obedience (v 22, 28, 37, 39, 44)?

Read Matthew 19:1-12

6. In this interaction with the Pharisees who have come to 'test' Jesus (v 3), Jesus reinforces his teaching on divorce (v 9). How possible do the disciples think it is to obey this teaching (see v 10)?

Read Matthew 19:13-15

7. Why does the kingdom of heaven belong to people who are 'such as' or 'like' little children?

Read Matthew 19:16-26

8. How possible do the disciples think it is for anyone to enter the kingdom of heaven/be saved?

9. How does God make it possible for anyone to be saved (v 26) and what does this have to do with the divorced Pharisees, the little children and the rich young ruler?

Apply

10. Divorce (with the exception of being due to marital unfaithfulness) is as pleasing to God as anger toward our brother, lust and greed. Lots of us wrestle with our anger, lust and greed throughout our Christian lives and will continue to. We're right to seek help in our battle with these things from other believers so that we don't just grow comfortable with them. What would it look like for us to help each other wrestle with divorce?

11. Marital unfaithfulness and domestic violence can turn marriage into the opposite of the thing God designed it to be and cause much trauma for those impacted by it. What practical things can we do to ensure we don't add to the trauma, but instead offer comfort, grace and support?

12. In light of this study, how should the church treat those of us who have been divorced?

Pray

4

No room for hypocrisy #1

Warm-up

How do you feel about celebrities publicly announcing how much money they've given to different causes?

Investigate

Read Matthew 6:1

1. This verse is a bit of a theme for the next 18 verses. What are the 'acts of righteousness' that Jesus is talking about (see v2, 5, 16)?

2. Are these 'acts of righteousness' always good? When is it bad to perform these acts of righteousness?

3. Who is the primary audience Jesus wants us to play our lives out before? Who is the primary audience you're playing your life out before?

Read Matthew 6:2-4

4. Jesus makes the assumption here that his followers give to the needy. What is a hypocrite, and what is their motivation for giving to the needy?

5. What does Jesus mean when he says 'they have received their reward in full'?

6. How does Jesus say his followers ought to give to the needy? What does he mean by this?

7. What does Jesus mean when he says that your Father 'will reward you'?

Read Ephesians 1:3 and 2 Corinthians 8:9

8. In what sense have we who believed received more than sufficient reward from our Father in heaven?

Apply

9. What is your motivation for giving?

10. What are some practical ways you can do your giving 'in secret', or not let 'your left hand know what your right hand is doing'?

11. How can we remind ourselves that our Father in heaven sees what we're doing and that he is the primary audience we should be doing our giving before?

Pray

5

No room for hypocrisy #2

Warm-up

When have you been really impressed by someone's prayer? What impressed you?

Investigate

Read Matthew 6:5-6

1. How do the hypocrites pray? Describe it in your own words.

2. How ought we pray instead?

Read Matthew 6:7-8

3. How do the pagans pray? Describe it in your own words.

4. How ought we pray instead?

Read Matthew 6:9-13

5. In verse 9 Jesus gives a contrasting way to pray compared to the hypocrites and the pagans. Why is it important that we notice Jesus says 'This, then, is how you should pray' rather than, 'This, then is what you should pray'?

6. Verses 9 and 10 model how we should pray with regard to God—his name, his kingdom and his will. What should our prayers be asking for in regards to God's name, his kingdom and his will? Try to re-write verses 9 and 10 in your own words.

7. The last half of this model prayer (v11-13) models what we should be praying for ourselves. What do these words show us that we should want for our lives? Try to re-write verses 11 to 13 in your own words.

Read Matthew 6:14-15

8. Why do you think it is so important for Christians to be able to forgive the sins of others?

Read Matthew 6:16-18

9. Jesus assumes his disciples will fast in v 16. In Leviticus, fasting was commanded once a year on the Day of Atonement, but we learn in Zechariah that, during the exile, regular fasts of remembrance were instituted. Both the Old and New Testaments speak of fasts to foster self-humiliation in connection with the confession of sins, to lay some petition before the Lord, or just as part of normal Christian self-discipline (I got this from Don Carson's commentary on Matthew). It's important to notice that fasting is voluntary and not commanded in the New Testament. How does Jesus say fasting should happen here?

Apply

10. Some people will read this, already petrified about praying in public, and never feel comfortable praying in public. That is not the purpose of this section. This is here, like the rest of this section, to stop us using prayer as a chance to seek recognition from people rather than God. What does it mean for the way we pray:

- in front of the congregation?

- in small groups?

- in private?

Pray

6

Watch where you're going

Warm-up

What would be the ideal birthday gift for you?

Investigate

Read Matthew 6:19-21

1. What are treasures on earth? Give some examples.
2. Why should we stop storing up treasures on earth (see also 1 Tim 6:10, James 5:1-3)?
3. What are treasures in heaven and how do we store them up (See for example Matt 5:12, 6:4, 6:6, 6:14)?
4. What do things we store up/treasure say about our heart?

Read Matthew 6:22-23

5. Like the lamp on the front porch lights up the whole porch, Jesus says the eyes, when they are good, light up our whole body. Given what we just looked at in verses 19 to 21, what will good eyes be focusing on?
6. By contrast, what will our eyes be focused on if our body is full of darkness?

Read Matthew 6:24

7. What lies behind the choice of where we store up our treasure and where we fix our eyes?

8. It's possible to work for two employers, but you just cannot be a slave to two masters. Describe what it would look like to be a slave to God as opposed to a slave to money.

Read John 18:36

9. Jesus is on trial facing potential crucifixion before Pontius Pilate here. What do we learn here (and in the events that followed) about where Jesus' eyes are fixed, where his treasure is and who his master is?

Apply

10. Consider the way you are using the next week of your life. Where are you storing up treasures in this coming week? Where are your eyes focused? Give some detail on these things.

11. In what ways may you be trying to serve two masters in your life? How can you shift your allegiance away from money toward God?

Pray

7

Don't worry about your life

warm-up

What's the thing you're most worried about this week?

Investigate

Read Matthew 6:25

1. Last week we saw Jesus tell his disciples not to focus on obtaining wealth. Here he challenges his disciples to take their attitude toward material things to yet another level. What does he say his disciples' attitude should be toward all material things here?

Read Matthew 6:26-27

2. Jesus' point here isn't that his disciples don't need to work; it is that they don't need to worry. What grounds does he give his disciples for not worrying?

3. What does the end of verse 27 tell us about the benefits of worrying?

Read Matthew 6:28-30

4. Jesus' point here is not that his disciples can just sit back and be lazy when it comes to clothes. What is his point?

5. What does Jesus say in verse 30 lies behind our worry about material things? Explain.

Read Matthew 6:31-32

6. How does Jesus say his disciples should be different to those around them, and what reason does he give them for being different?

Read Matthew 6:33

7. Jesus gives his disciples something to fill their minds with here instead of worries about temporal things. What does he call them to do here? What does he mean by this?

8. Jesus assures his disciples that all necessary things will be given to them by their heavenly Father. What does this mean when it comes to Christians experiencing times of scarcity—even to the point of death?

Read Matthew 6:34

9. In this verse and the last one, Jesus makes it clear where his disciples' thought world is to be focused. Where are we to focus our thoughts today?

Read Hebrews 12:1-3

10. What do we learn here about Jesus' trust in his Father and where his thoughts were focused?

Apply

11. Share some of your worries with the group. Using this passage, help each other to not worry.

12. Pray for each other that you might trust in the Lord's provision and seek first his kingdom today.

Pray

8

Live for the kingdom

Warm-up

What's a current trend that you think people will regret getting on board with?

Investigate

Read Matthew 7:1-12

1. What does Jesus expect from his disciples when it comes to judging the sin of others according to verses 1 to 5?

2. Jesus seems to change topic in v 6, but he's really just continuing his counsel on how his disciples ought to perceive non-believers. Keeping in mind that 'what is sacred' in Matthew is the good news about Jesus' kingdom, and that Jesus wants disciples from all nations, what is he cautioning against here (see also Matthew 10:14 and 15:14)?

3. In verses 7 to 11 Jesus exhorts his followers to pray. He tells them to ask and they'll be given. In light of what Jesus has spoken to his disciples about so far (for example 5:3-10, 6:19-20, 7:6), what kind of good gifts (v 11) do you think he's promising the Father will give to those who ask him?

4. In verse 12, Jesus isn't just saying 'actually forget this whole sermon so far, just do unto others'. What is he saying?

Read Matthew 7:13-27

5. After some fairly challenging instruction, Jesus leaves his listeners with a clear challenge in verses 13 and 14. What is Jesus telling his disciples in these verses?

6. How is Jesus' account of the two trees in v 15-20 and his explanation in v 21 to 23 a re-statement of his teaching about the narrow and wide gate?

7. According to v 21, who will enter the kingdom of heaven (please don't forget Matthew 19:25- 26)?

8. In v 24 to 27 Jesus talks about the wise and foolish builders. What is Jesus telling his disciples is the most important thing? What does he mean by this?

Read Matthew 7:28-29

9. As Jesus finishes his teaching, the crowds are amazed at his authority. What kind of authority might they be recognising in Jesus (see Matthew 3:17, 4:16-17; 4:23, 28:18)?

10. Why is listening to Jesus and seeking to obey him so important?

Apply

11. Give some examples of how you find it difficult to follow the narrow road of living for Christ. How can you better help each other to stick to the narrow road?

12. Our Father in heaven does care for us and he has given us access to the Kingdom of his heaven through the death and resurrection of Jesus. If we struggle with our obedience to Christ, he tells us to ask our Father. He gives good gifts to those who ask him. Adopting the character of Matthew 5:3-10 and obeying Jesus is important for us as followers of Christ. Finish our time in the Sermon on the Mount praying to our Father that he would help us with those things (that he would help us to be wise, not foolish builders).

Pray