

Lecture 6 - Organization of Followers / Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5:1-48, 12:15-21; Mark 3:7-19; Luke 6:12-36

When I say, "We the people . . ." what comes to mind?

The preamble to the Constitution – our foundation for freedom.

When I say, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" what do you think of? The great novel by Charles Dickens A Tale of Two Cities in which the hero, Sydney Carton, lays down his life for a friend. "It is a far, far better thing I do than I have ever done before."

When I say, "Fourscore and seven years ago . . . "

The Gettysburg Address is known by everyone who has had some schooling. This brief two minute cemetery dedication speech given by Abraham Lincoln is a landmark of patriotic remembrance.

When I say, "Blessed are . . ."

I hope you remember (or have at least learned from this lesson) it is the great teaching from the Sermon on the Mount given by Jesus. This profound teaching can be found in Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7. And, no doubt, these basic truths were repeated on many occasions as Jesus taught both the disciples and the crowds that followed. There is so much substance to this sermon, that it will take us a couple of weeks to study it. For this week, we've just covered Matthew 5 as

Jesus taught His disciples and part of Luke 6 as he descended from the mountain and taught them more within the hearing of a crowd.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

Our lesson this week divided the Scriptures into three main sections: sickness – selection – sermons.

We started off with the issue of sickness – Jesus' healing ministry. It was this manifestation of God's power that drew notice and criticism from the Pharisees and religious leaders. It was this gift of God's compassion that drew the crowds to follow Jesus so closely. Jesus had, in today's vernacular, become a "celebrity." They were coming from far and wide. So He sought some solitude – not because He was repulsed by the diseased and needy, but because He must stay focused on His mission . . . the Kingdom of God was at hand . . . He had good news to share for those who had ears to hear. The evil spirits even acknowledged Him, "You are the Son of God," but the crowds saw only the need to press in on – and touch – the miracle worker.

Before selecting His intimate group of disciples, Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray. What do you suppose He and the Father and the Holy Spirit communed about?

Who to call? How many? Could mere frail human beings carry the message after He was gone? How much teaching could they

absorb? How much access would Satan be allowed to have with them? Would man's free will thwart the will of God?

Who knows the content of Jesus' prayer . . . certainly we don't. But we do know the call was to be given to twelve, and one of those would choose to be a traitor.

How great is the love of God to call us . . . knowing all about us . . . offering Himself to us with unconditional love and risking the rejection of a hardened heart. It truly is amazing grace!!

The twelve were chosen: Simon (called Peter) and his brother, Andrew. James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Philip, Bartholomew (also known as Nathanael), Matthew (also known as Levi), Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Thaddaeus (also known as Jude or Judas son of James), and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

Jesus' call to the apostles was to be with Him, to be sent out to preach and have the authority to drive out demons. Sometimes I think we get the impression that only these twelve followed Jesus, but He had many followers. Some would stay, some would leave. But this was the inner core . . . those into whom Jesus would pour His life and to whom He would entrust His ministry for the future of mankind.

It was a simple plan, but discipleship is not the easy life. You follow Jesus to learn about Him, to understand what He did for you, to

grasp what He offers you. But knowing about Jesus is not enough. You become a disciple when you surrender your life to be “in Christ”; His priorities become your priorities; you are willing to be His ambassador; you commit to standing or even perhaps dying for your faith.

Now it was time for Jesus to teach His disciples the principles that would change their thinking / change their concepts of the relationships between 1) man and God, and 2) man with his peers.

It begins with what we call the Beatitudes. Perhaps we could get a grasp on the teaching if we think of it in terms of eight steps in spiritual mountain climbing:

1. Initial step – **Humility** (a conscious need)

Matt. 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This isn't poor in the sense of financial poverty, rather a humble spirit that acknowledges its spiritual bankruptcy before God. James 4:10 “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.”

2. Step two – **Sorrow** (a mourning for sin)

Matt. 5:4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

It describes the sorrow of a broken heart, the ache of a longing soul, the anguish of a troubled mind. In context, it most likely refers

to a passionate spirit of contrition that will be comforted as God binds up the wounds of a repentant heart. Psalm 34:18 "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saved those who are crushed in spirit."

3. Step three – **Meekness** (marking the birth of a new spirit)

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

You know you're a spiritual babe with so much to learn about your great God – your Creator. You've heard that meekness is the word meaning power brought under control, not a wimp. The strong power of faith enables even the new Christian to be polite, courteous, teachable and treat others with dignity. These characteristics fall into the category of the meek.

4. Step four – **Spiritual appetite** (signifying growth)

Matt: 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

This is a description of those with an unquenchable thirst to know more about God and His Word, those who want to drink deeply from the fountain of truth. They will be satisfied. 1 Peter 2:2 "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation."

❖ Just as the first tablet of the Ten Commandments concentrated on our relationship with God and the second on our relationship with people, so it is with the Sermon on the Mount. The first four beatitudes

have a man to God perspective. The last four have the man to man relationship.

5. Step five –**Being merciful** (an attribute of God, indicating further maturity)

Matt: 5:7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Mercy is a concern for people that goes beyond sympathy to empathy. It doesn't stop with an outpouring of emotion; it stoops to offer help. It's a Good Samaritan attitude that assists those who suffer the consequences of sin, pain, misery, or distress. By showing mercy, Scripture says here we certainly reap what we sow.

6. Step six –**Purity of heart** (attaining higher attitudes)

Matt: 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

To live a life transparent before God and others and have no guile or hidden motives is what we're to aim for as the Holy Spirit works in us to conform us to the image of Christ. Psalm 143:10 "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground."

7. Step seven –**Peacemaking** (a Christ-like influence that calms others)

Matt: 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Peacemakers never seek conflict. They seek solutions, not argument. They're "quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger" (James 1:19). But make no mistake, a peacemaker is not synonymous for an appeaser. It's not peace at any price. To overlook flagrant sin or embrace doctrinal heresy for the sake of peace only cheapens it.

8. The summit of climbing our spiritual mountain – **suffering** for Christ (standing beside the prophets and martyrs)

Matt: 5:10-12 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Never forget that the world is at odds with God. James 4:4 "They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you." Persecution can come as a result of your faith, but you're in good company. The best response in such situations is not to recoil or retaliate in the face of rejection, but rejoice. Why? Because ultimately a heavenly award awaits you.

So there you have it . . . the guide to Christian character in 12 simple verses, but Jesus goes on.

Spread the salt and shine the light. You have a job to do. You're to purify, cleanse, season, and create a thirst within those you influence like salt performs those functions. You have that power as a disciple of Christ.

John 8:12 says, "When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." We follow Jesus and corporately (together) Christians are a city on a hill (like when you fly over a city in an airplane at night and see all the lights below). And individually our light is meant to be used, to be shared, not stuck away or hidden. The world is a dark place for the most part, but you have a light within you to dispel that darkness and that is what Jesus calls us to do.

Can you imagine what the disciples were thinking as they heard this teaching? Whew – change my life, change my thinking, get active – be proactive! This is sure different from what the Pharisees taught it meant to be righteous.

One of the things we learned from last week's lesson was about the Law – the Kingdom of God was not a new patch on an old wineskin. The gospel of grace was not a patch to Old Testament Law, but a new covenant between God and His people.

Jeremiah 9:31-33 Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the **covenant** that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my **covenant** that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the **covenant** that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: **I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.** And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Jesus did not come to abolish the Law (and by the way, you know that keeping the Law did not save you in Old Testament – it has always been salvation by grace – but the Law showed man what sin is – why we needed to be reconciled to God) . . . so Jesus did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it.

No more would there be a need for the blood of animal sacrifices, because the perfect Lamb of God would take away the sins of the world through His own shed blood. Jesus would be the One to become the bridge . . . to make that way open for man to have that personal relationship with God. “I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father but through Me.” (John 14:6)

So Jesus said, "Don't think I came to abolish the Law or the prophets, I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

Doctrinally, prophetically, and ethically, He did just that. In His birth, life, death and resurrection, He brought the Scriptures to completion. He asserted that He was neither above the Law nor in conflict with it. He believed in it fully and kept it faithfully.

The Law was good . . . the prophets spoke truth. But how do you exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees?

It isn't by doing . . . it's by being.

The Pharisees taught against the action of premeditated murder but not against the attitude that spawned it. The way for the people to surpass the righteousness of their religious leaders was not to mow the moral weeds on the surface of their lives, but to pull them up by the roots. And the root of murder is anger. Not righteous or justifiable anger, but anger that sits on the burner of rage and boils over into abuse. Verbal abuse demeans a person's intelligence and his character. By harboring such feelings and pronouncing such judgments, we place ourselves on the scale of judgment.

But Jesus gave two examples of dealing with anger: First, stop what you're doing – even if it's worship – and go mend the fences of fellowship. If you've been offended . . . go and try to mend the rift. We know that that's not easily accomplished in some cases.

But you must try. If you're the offender . . . apologize and mean it. Being forgiven is the other person's spiritual responsibility; but you must do whatever is in your power to do.

Second, Jesus' advice is to settle matters out of court as quickly as possible without letting the matter fester. My daughter is a court reporter and her days are sometimes filled with hearing anger displayed in the courtroom, especially family court. You may have experienced some of that if you've ever served jury duty.

I want to make an observation –John R. W. Stott's commentary on the Sermon on the Mount speaks of a Christian's righteousness (as opposed to the righteousness of the Pharisees), in Matthew chapter 5, verses 17-48 and takes 56 pages to do it; Charles Swindoll's book Simple Faith has 6 chapters; and Stuart Briscoe's commentary takes 130 pages to expound on the verses in our lesson today. I tell you that to say – that there is no way in the time that we have left to us that I can comment in-depth on the issues of adultery, divorce, keeping your word, retaliation and loving your enemies in any depth that they deserve. So I'll just share a few thoughts with you.

Let me say that none of those things constitutes the unpardonable sin that is sometimes conjured up in our minds if we've committed one of them. A Christian who has lapsed into sin can always be forgiven by a merciful Heavenly Father with true

repentance. But we also know that with sin often comes the responsibility of consequences.

In His simple instructions to the disciples, Jesus introduced the startling statement that: unbridled lust equals adultery. It isn't just a physical act, it can also be a mental act, an action of the heart. When you recognize the temptation (and it's all around us these days), cut it off! Refuse to yield; delete the email; exit the internet; change the channel; watch for sexual traps; take control of yourself. Jesus is saying that lust makes an inroad to our heart through the eye. Therefore, we should stop lust at the gate, using whatever measures necessary to turn it away. The intruder to the marriage relationship is not always outside the home; it's the lust inside a person's heart. Deal with it decisively!

The subject of adultery logically introduces a possible consequence – divorce. Jesus lived in a day when views about divorce were batted back and forth between rabbinic schools like a badminton birdie. And we're going to study more about that in Matthew 19 where the Pharisees were preoccupied with grounds of divorce, but Jesus was preoccupied with the institution of marriage.

Here, however, Jesus confirms that grounds for divorce occur when there is a continuation of sexual intimacy with someone outside the marriage bond. Even so, divorce is not prescribed, only permitted.

No doubt every one of you has in some way been touched by the issue of divorce somewhere in your family. You know the sorrow, the hurt, the consequences. And a part of that comes from what Jesus talks about next . . . keeping a vow.

Oaths involve taking vows for the purpose of adding veracity to our statements; by doing that, we shore up our sagging credibility with promises. Remember how we used to do this as kids, “Cross my heart and hope to die; or I swear on a stack of Bibles.” We add these little oaths to fortify what we say because we’re afraid people won’t take our word at face value. Jesus makes the point that our character should have so much credibility that the simplest of statements should be enough to guarantee our intentions. Let our “yes be yes” and our “no be no.”

If we’re ever going to make an impact on our culture, we can’t be conformed to it. We need to **release instead of resist**, and **love instead of hate**.

Release your right to personal dignity. Have you ever gotten that “slap in the face” (a backhanded insult)? A natural reaction is to return the insult. This isn’t talking about self-defense, but rather it’s talking about seeking revenge . . . we need to turn the other cheek.

Release your right to comforts. Jesus is teaching His disciples that they should be willing to part with whatever may be legally theirs for the benefit of the kingdom and the good of others.

Release your right to ownership. Whether it be your time – going above and beyond the call of duty to do something for someone else, or simply lending a truck or a tool to a neighbor. What God has given us we are to share freely, graciously and ungrudgingly with others.

Love instead of hate. God is love by His very nature. He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good and He sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous. But human love reserves the right to hate, to wish evil on another. “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,” Jesus said. How foreign such actions are to the human spirit. That’s why we need the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It’s easier to love those who look like us, talk like us, agree with us . . . but God’s love is shown to us through example (Jesus Christ Himself) and through the experience of our own salvation. We were enemies of God, yet He loved us and redeemed us. And because we have both the example and the experience, we have the enablement (with the power of the Holy Spirit) to exercise God’s love in our world.

Vs. 48 “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Alfred Plummer writes, “To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; to return good for evil is divine. To

love as God loves is moral perfection, and it is this perfection Christ tells us to aim at.”

Just as you might pick up a household tool, say a wrench that fits for the job to be done, it’s a “perfect” wrench. That is, it has fulfilled the purpose for which it was made. In similar fashion, we fulfill the purpose for which we were made when we love as God loves.

Luke 6 describes Jesus as coming down to a level place and giving much the same instruction as we just studied in Matthew. Perhaps it was after He went up to pray that He came down to teach; or it was just another account of the same teaching. What strikes us as different in Luke’s account is the recounting of the woes to the crowd:

Woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your reward. If money and worldly possessions are your goal in life, go for it because it’s all you’re going to have and you can’t take it with you. No amount of money can buy you out of spiritual bankruptcy.

Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. We eat to live, but there are those who live to eat and satisfy every excessive craving they have. But satisfy the body without feeding the soul and you will spiritually starve to death.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. We live in the world dedicated to entertainment of every kind – keep it light,

bring on the clowns. There is a time for merriment, but there is also a time to be serious. And when it comes to the condition of your soul and your relationship with God, it is serious business. Hell is no laughing matter.

Woe to you when all men speak well of you for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets. Scriptures repeatedly tell us to beware of false prophets who tell us what we want to hear. They tickle our ears with half truths or distorted fancy. So many achieve celebrity status as great speakers or great leaders, yet their message can be our downfall if we buy into any teaching that is not biblically based.

Living for ourselves today without heed to eternity and the condition of our eternal souls, will end in woe. God created us to be eternal beings and we cannot . . . we dare not . . . neglect our relationship to God.

And finally, the Golden Rule. Luke 6:31 "Do to others as you would have them do to you." What more is there to say? The words are simple, the living out of them is the challenge.

I've taken the challenge from Dan to read the Scriptures each week with the question in mind, What does Jesus teach me about God?

Personally, I think Matthew 12:18-21 citing the prophet Isaiah sums it up the most . . . God's overwhelming love for man to send Jesus to teach us, to correct us, to save us, to give us hope.

"Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; on one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope." (Is. 42:1-4) Jesus is my blessed hope and I pray he is yours also.

Let's pray.