

The Sermon on the Mount #5

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[0 : 00] Thank you and good morning, church. It's good to see you and thank you for this opportunity to open God's word and let God speak to us. So let's just pray now. Heavenly Father, Lord, your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

Lord, speak into our hearts now, Lord, and transform them. Change our hearts of stone to hearts of flesh that see the world the way you see it and reach out then in love.

I pray this in your son's name. Amen. Well, this is going to be a bit of a heavy one. If you just saw the reading then, it's pretty full on.

And so I'm trying to... I can't lighten it up, but I'm just letting you know that it's going to be pretty full on. I heard a story once about a preacher in a small town who preached up a storm.

He started with this amazing illustration. He led into opening God's word. And then really by the end of it, everyone was convicted of their sin, their need to repent, and their need to live for Jesus each day.

[1 : 12] And so word got around town. It was a small town. And so everyone turned up the following week. The church was packed. Everyone from the town turned up. And he started off with the same illustration.

And I went, oh, I heard it last week, but that's a good illustration. I like hearing it again. And then launched into the same sermon, word for word.

And they all came out. And because other people hadn't heard it that week before, they went, good sermon. Thanks very much. And they went on their way. And the following week, they all turned up again.

And he preached exactly the same sermon, word for word. And the following week, they all turned up. And he preached the same sermon, word for word. They're starting to get a bit worried.

Is this, you know, what's it called? An age moment? I don't know. Like, is he getting premature dementia? I don't know. Like, what was it? And who's going to speak to him?

[2 : 08] You know, has he just sort of turned up and got the same folder? And anyway, someone was brave enough. And they went up to him. And they said, you seem to be preaching the same sermon every week.

We kind of like your style. But, you know, we like your variety as well. Can't you just, what's the reason? You've got a reason. He said, it's one thing to know it. It's another thing to put it into practice.

Then he goes on to say, I'll start preaching something new when we all start doing it. And not really a joke, but just a case of put it into action.

This new year, we have been working through the Sermon on a Mount. One of the most famous pieces of teaching in the history of the human race.

It's been heard of by a lot of people. But at the same time, it's a misunderstood piece of teaching. Even though it's actually not difficult to understand.

[3 : 10] Rather, it seems that those who know of the Sermon on the Mount actually haven't read it for themselves. Oh yeah, I know of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus was a good guy.

You know, he had some moral teachings, didn't he? Something about loving people, I guess, in there somewhere. Some moral reflections or suggestions on how to live. Take it or leave it.

The Sermon on the Mount is not like that at all. It actually calls us to make an extremely important choice. Choose life.

Jesus came to give us life to the full. This is life and what it means to live life according to being part of God's kingdom and it's on God's terms. Having been chosen by God, we now have a daily choice to live as followers of Jesus.

Jesus lays it out in the Sermon on the Mount. What it means to live a life in him and God has very high standards. Jesus is not talking about a better moral code or burdensome new laws that we

have to achieve to get a tick in God's good books.

[4 : 23] Jesus is showing what life can be like if we follow him and if we trust him. Like the minister who kept preaching the same sermon until everyone decided to do it, we can't walk away from Jesus' words unaffected.

We need to hear them again and again and be reminded there is a call to action. Make a choice. Live for God's upside down kingdom each and every day.

As we come to Matthew 7, we will see the important choices we must make in relationships and how we can call on God to help. Jesus shifts from warning his followers about their own personal temptations concerning wealth and worry to temptations that can surface in their relationships with each other.

Jesus has something to say about our relationships because following Jesus should make a difference to how we relate to one another, to our brothers and to our sisters.

Matthew 7, verse 1. Do not judge or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

[5 : 47] Our culture, more than ever, seems super judgmental, hypercritical, touchy, easily offended.

Social media algorithms, I think, play into this a little bit. People want to post images, get likes, get followers. There's a guy, Mr Beast, who's got millions of followers and do perfect.

There's all these people and they make a living out of getting followers. Instagram posts, getting likes, whether it's on home renos or decorations or I actually personally follow a thing called van life. Van life's these people who do up the interior vans and they, anyway, they're nice. So there's sort of, sometimes it's a little bit positive but it can also be a negative.

If you don't fly a particular flag or have a political allegiance and it lies outside popular culture, expect to be vilified, a media pylon, face the wrath of the cancel culture who are judge, jury and executioner.

[6 : 59] But we judge all the time, superficial judgments, self-righteous judgments, hypocritical judgments, unfair and ill-informed judgments, harsh, unforgiving judgments.

When we meet people, before we've even opened our mouths, before we go into a conversation with them, we do a top to toe. I like their eyes, nice smile, look at the shirt they're wearing, oh they've had a haircut, nice haircut, all the way down to, oh I wouldn't wear those shoes, or all the accessories that they're wearing that they have.

This is before we even say, oh hi, my name is, what do you do? What are your hobbies? Where do you live? What are your thoughts on this issue?

That's how we relate to one another, by judging each other, compartmentalizing, putting each other in a box, assessing whether they live up to a certain standard or the right postcode, if we have anything in common, where they fit in the social standing or pecking order of things.

And so we point the finger, I've done this in schools, and say, every time you point the finger, there's three pointing right back at you, to which you remember a student saying, I'm just going to point like this now.

[8 : 17] So obviously, there's no wrong in them. Do not judge. No, no, I'll do it this way. Do not judge. In these words, Jesus is saying, don't set ourselves up as judge.

That's God's job. Don't be self-righteous. Set ourselves up to judge and to criticize. If you find yourself doing this, Jesus is saying, there's no place for that amongst Christian people.

Christians aren't to judge. God is judge, and he will judge one day, and we'll answer to God. We'll answer to God's standards, not our own.

When it comes to Jesus, Jesus uses the very graphic image of a speck in someone's eye and a plank in our own. This is real, but we don't like to think of it as us.

It's not me. Preferably it's that person over there. Surely not me. But here's an opportunity right now even to think, where am I at with this? Am I judging and being judgmental?

[9 : 26] Do you find yourself being a bit judgy? What at stake here is our attitude. What does critical, judgmental character look like?

It's self-righteous and it's hypocritical. We may tell ourselves, I can afford to look down my nose at my less disciplined peers or my colleagues because of their recurring sin, some small deficiency or inconsistency in their lives.

We may conclude that their spiritual stature, personal integrity and useful service of others are all vastly inferior to our own. But it's condescending and actually fails to recognize our own sinfulness. I can't help but think of Jesus' response here when there's a crowd of people with stones in their hand ready to stone the adulterous. And notice if they're being consistent, the man should have been there as well.

And Jesus stands up and he says, those who have not sinned cast the first stone. And he goes back to doodling in the sand, whatever he's drawing or writing.

[10:37] And they all one by one drop their stones and walk away. And then he gets up and actually it's, those who have not sinned cast, Jesus can cast the first stone now because he has not sinned. And he goes on to say, neither do I condemn you, but go and leave your life of sin.

So don't keep doing it. Leave your life of sin. So if we're going to cast stones, listen to Jesus' words, that those who are without sin cast a stone.

Do you find that the very thing that you struggle with is the thing that you actually notice in someone? So I think it's because we're attuned to that sin or we're so practiced at it.

Like if you're someone who's used to concealing something, you'll notice someone else who's, oh, they're looking the other way when they're talking. They must be lying or something. And you notice you can be attuned to this. At which point we have a choice.

You can pounce and highlight it and go, ah, you're actually not telling the truth right now. Or you can first take the plank out of your own eye before you go to take the speck out of theirs.

[11:47] It's hypocritical and double standards to expect something from others that we can't accomplish ourselves. I can assure you, anyone who gets up in the pulpit and shares a message from the scriptures, they're convicted.

I'm not standing up here and saying, I don't struggle with anything that I'm sharing with you, the way you struggle. We're all convicted. There's nothing self-righteous.

You pour over the scriptures and you go, wow, I'm preaching on this. I'm going to say, this is what God says. But at the end of the day, I really struggle with this myself. So I want to be clear about that.

But in the same way we judge, we'll be judged, and do we really want God to use that measure against us? Because I think humans can be really merciless and yet God shows grace and mercy. We don't want him to judge us the way we judge each other, I think, personally. Jesus is saying, we shouldn't give up any capacity to discern right from wrong and I'm going to get to that in a moment.

[12:54] It's not that we should never help one another or completely refrain from pointing out some wrongdoing. But first, be prepared to take that plank out of your eye and once that's dealt with, then remove the specks.

This is about how we relate to one another. As Christians, there needs to be a difference. And if we go back to Matthew 5, verse 7, remember the blessed.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. What Jesus is saying here, as we come into a relationship with God, kingdom living involves humility.

It involves self-reflection and it involves repentance. In God's upside-down kingdom, our lives have to change. We won't feel the need to assert our rightness all the time because when we're in God's kingdom, we're secure enough to recognise that we've got faults and everyone, every one of us are fully reliant on God's grace.

We can acknowledge our own faults and at the same time, if need be, are able to encourage others to turn back to Christ. And I think here in Galatians, Galatians chapter 6, we read, Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently, but watch yourselves or you also may be tempted.

[14:29] Carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. Restore gently, but first, take the plank out of our own eyes and then work on the speck in theirs.

But be careful also that whatever they're struggling with, you then don't get tempted and drawn into yourself. Jesus has been talking about how Christians need to relate to one another.

Don't copy the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. And he's now addressing how we relate to non-Christians. He goes from saying, do not judge, this is really tricky now, I think, and we're going, what?

To requiring us to actually make a judgment call. Jesus goes on to talk about dogs and pigs. And they're his labels, they're not mine, they're his, and so it's Jesus' words and they're full on.

He's not talking about non-Christians in general. He's talking about those who just, like Pharaoh's heart that hardened, don't want anything to do with this at all. The sacred pearl here that Jesus is talking about here is the gospel.

[15 : 41] And if I could put it this way, in one hand, we've got God's love and God's compassion and in the other hand, we've got God's judgment.

That is the gospel. God's judgment is poured out on his son because he shows compassion and love to us. You want to know about God's love?

You've got to have the full gospel. What I'm hearing today from society is this. I want to know about God's love and compassion but I don't want to hear about judgment.

I don't want to hear that judgment's coming. I don't want to hear that I'm going to be judged. But you don't get the full gospel if you don't bring in judgment. And when I say, how do you know God loves me?

Because he took the judgment for me on the cross. But people don't want to hear that today. They don't want to hear it. So don't cast your pearls before dogs and pigs.

[16 : 42] In other words, don't bother sharing the gospel with people who have decisively rejected it. We need to recognize them for who they are and this is a judgment call.

When Jesus says don't judge, he's not saying remove all our critical faculties or under no circumstances can we hold no opinions about right and wrong. Jesus turned tables you remember. He turned tables at injustice. Dietrich Bonhoeffer stood up against Hitler. It actually saw him imprisoned and later executed because he stood up and spoke against evil.

Evil prospers when good people do and say nothing. Christians must have a voice in society. What Jesus is saying is that we must recognize those in the world who have so rejected Christ that there comes a point when we're not to waste our time any longer casting the pearls of the gospel before them.

We have to discern when we're speaking pearls to those who have ears to hear and when the pearl of the gospel is being trampled underfoot. But how can we know?

[17 : 55] I think it's hard to know. You don't know people's hearts or you can't read their thoughts. But there probably are occasions when we're proverbially shown the door.

I don't want to hear this anymore. So there's no point carrying on with this and it always blows me away. It's an amazing message of forgiveness, hope, and love.

And people don't want to hear it. The intent of the Sermon on the Mount is to listen to Jesus' words and to act upon them. Our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ should be different. Jesus has presented us with two difficult tasks. One, a standard in the way we relate to one another and if we're honest, we know how difficult this can be.

Do not judge. And two, he's actually set out that we need to discern and recognise those who are the dogs and pigs which can be too tricky and it might be too quick to actually write people off because you hear of amazing conversion stories of total Christopher Hitchens, brother Peter Hitchens, Christopher Hitchens, total atheist, Peter Hitchens was as well, Peter Hitchens now just loves Jesus and shares the message of the resurrection.

[19 : 14] So how can we know? Come to our heavenly father and ask. Let's take out all the verses, Jesus didn't have verses. What follows on from this is Matthew 7, verses 7 to 11.

Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives.

Those who seek find and to those who knock the door will be opened. Which of you their son or daughter asks for bread will give them a stone? or if they ask for a fish will give them a snake? If you then though you are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?

Ask seek knock. these words are often used in sermons to give the impression that God is our personal vending machine. I actually know someone from a different denomination and I don't want to make a judgment call here but I think they're wrong in this.

[20 : 29] I'm not judgment about the denomination but what they believe is that you can demand things from God. I demand a new surfboard or I demand a new car. I don't read that here.

But if you want stuff just ask. I want more money or I want success in my relationships or business just ask and God will dispense our every wish.

Now I actually do believe it doesn't hurt to ask. Ask sure. But God isn't the cosmic Santa Claus and we need only bring our Christmas wish list and God will tick it off for us or give us a hunk of coal. What I actually believe there's no harm in asking and God knows the difference between our needs and our wants we need to look at the context of ask seek knock.

Followers of Jesus will find it difficult to not judge on the one hand and on the other hand be wisely discerning able to assess someone's willingness and openness to the gospel.

[21 : 34] It's a difficult ask so ask God. To ask naturally indicates prayer but seek and knock are also metaphors of prayer.

Ask seek knock seems to suggest an escalation a rising scale of intensity in our prayers and points to the persistent manner in our lives of asking our heavenly father.

Ask indicates how we come to God with humility conscious of a real deep felt need like a child asking for something from their parents. seek links prayer with a responsible action of pursuing God's will a bit like praying for a job and also actively pursuing work.

You don't just have it fall in your lap necessarily. Knock includes perseverance if one is asking and seeking like you may spend a lifetime persistently praying for a family member or a friend.

I've got a friend that I've been friends with since year seven and I pray for him regularly. He's not a Christian and I know that at one stage at university he really told me in certain words don't ever talk to me about Jesus again but then his father got cancer and he said is there any Bible verses that could help him and so he's not a Christian yet but I got him a Bible and sent it to him and I got him a study and he actually put together a set of Bible verses for his father to read and so he still hasn't committed his life to Jesus but I still am persistently praying and I do think even then of my daughter when she was three the one who did that amazing painting anyway I remember I was working in the study and dad dad dad and she was just knocking at the door I'm busy I'm busy I'm busy but at some point you've got to answer that door and I answer the door and knock pray persistently in the sermon on the mount

[23 : 42] Jesus makes it clear what it means to live as life as a member of God's kingdom if we want to live God's way loving your enemies persevering when persecuted giving to the needy being salt and light in the world not worrying about tomorrow storing up treasures in heaven forgiving others not sitting in the seat of judgment yet discerning decisively who have rejected Jesus if we want to live God's way in God's world then we ask we seek and we knock like the persistent widow in Luke 18 she kept going to that unjust judge until she got a result don't give up bring it all before God in prayer and trust if we are going to be at all serious about living the life Jesus offers on the Sermon on the Mount then we have to ask our heavenly father to strengthen us by his

Holy Spirit to enable us to live this life the life God intends for us and what Jesus says here if humans who are naturally evil and you notice that he calls us evil in fact remember the rich young ruler who tries to tick off the Ten Commandments yes all I have things I've done sell everything and follow me but when he comes to Jesus as good teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life and Jesus says why do you call me good only God is good so let's be clear you who are evil give good gifts to your kids and I hope we do how much more will God give good gifts to those who ask Bono the lead singer from U2 was once asked do you pray and he said yeah of course I pray and he said well what sort of things do you pray and he said I pray that God's will will be done then it's more likely to happen in Matthew 7 verse 12

Jesus sums up all of it he says so in everything do unto others as you would have them do unto you this sums up the law and the prophets ask and you will receive seek and you will find knock and the door will be opened unto you throughout the sermon on the mount Jesus references the old testament the law and the prophets and he says here it could pretty much be summed up in this golden rule severus reputedly had it written on his wall in gold do unto others as you would have them do unto you there's a misconception people said oh that's just common to all religions or all philosophies and faith traditions this is actually not the case the parallels to Jesus teaching appear in the negative one example is Confucius he wrote do not inflict on others what you yourself would not wish done to you it's subtle but it's different to refrain from hurting others so you don't get harmed it's not the same as doing good to others even if they don't deserve it the difference between for example deciding not to punch my enemy in the nose and deciding to build my enemy a hospital they're dramatically different two different ways of living one is negative and one's proactive it's positive it's affirmative action and that's how we're to live there's no parallel to

Jesus teaching Jesus call to love is premised on God's love his call to love enemies doesn't make sense without Jesus repeated emphasis that God is merciful and gracious to the ungrateful and the wicked and then proving it as Jesus dies on the cross for his enemies words accompanied with actions why love enemies why be gracious why not judge show mercy to the others who don't deserve it because God loves his enemies and shows grace and mercy to those who don't deserve it God's judge that's his job the logic is important and we get the heartbeat of Jesus teaching here and I want to put this in a sentence what we think lies at the heart of reality shapes what we think is an authentic human life what we think lies at the heart of reality shapes what we think is an authentic human life life with

Jesus now and forever is reality Jesus offers life can we imagine a world where we're all living like Jesus where we're not thinking of our own needs seeking the best for number one but actually looking out to help others sharing the hope of Jesus Jesus came into this world to make that life possible the sermon on the mount is a glimpse at the relationships of those who follow Christ and what the relationship they'll find themselves engaged in noticeably transformed by the gospel and living for God's upside down kingdom the rest of the chapter I'm finishing up here is about how gospel can impact our life with warnings to be wise and reminders judgment is coming verse 13 enter through the narrow gate wide is the road that leads to destruction verse 15 watch out for false prophets wolves in sheep's clothing by their fruit you will know them verse 21 not everyone who says to me lord lord will enter the kingdom of heaven but only the ones who do the will of my father who is in heaven verse 24 everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise person who built their house on the rock you know what happened when he finished teaching they were amazed there was no one taught with such authority the preacher who gave the same sermon every week week in and week out was waiting to see if those who listened would respond and take action we can't walk away from the sermon on the mount unaffected we must take action in our lives it's one thing to know it's another thing to put it into practice and jc ryle's got an amazing quote here about this doctrine is useless so it's one thing to know it doctrine is useless if it's not accompanied by a holy life it is worse than useless it does positive harm something of the image of christ must be seen and observed by others in our private life and habits and character and doings so church ask and it will be given to you seek and you will find knock and the door will be opened to you for everyone who asks receives those who seek find and to those who knock the door will be opened let's pray heavenly father we thank you that you knock at our hearts and you say let me in lord open our hearts to you to your message to your word heavenly father we ask now that we can have the beautiful attitudes outlined in the sermon on the mount we pray that we can love our enemies lord we pray that we can hunger and thirst for righteousness lord we pray that we can seek you with all our hearts lord we pray that our eyes will see the need in this world our hands will reach out with your hands our feet will go where you will take us to share the gospel and your great word lord we knock and we ask that you answer these prayers your gospel will go forth your kingdom will grow in each of us and your amen