

Matthew 5:1-12

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[0:00] We are going to read Matthew chapter 4 verse 18 to Matthew chapter 5 verse 2. Tonight we're beginning our summer evening service series in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

It's one of the most well-known parts of Jesus' teaching, including the golden rule, the Lord's prayer, the command to love our enemies, the invitation to seek, and the promise that those who seek will find, and all kinds of other things that you might have heard somewhere before.

But we want to look more deeply into it and see what it has to say to us. So tonight I want to paint the big picture and look at some of the background of the Sermon on the Mount and sort of give you the 30,000 foot view and then we'll walk through the forest over the next 12 weeks.

All right, so Matthew chapter 4 starting at verse 18, it's page 809 if you're looking in one of the pew Bibles. Here we go. While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he, Jesus, saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea for they were fishermen.

And he said to them, follow me and I will make you fishers of men. Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

[1:29] And going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. And he called them.

Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

So his fame spread throughout all Syria and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics.

And he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis and from Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan. Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain.

And when he sat down, his disciples came to him and he opened his mouth and taught them. So we're looking at tonight the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount.

[2:36] Many people have admired the Sermon on the Mount throughout history. Thomas Jefferson said that Jesus' moral teachings embodied in this sermon were the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to mankind.

Or Gandhi, the Indian leader who is not a Christian, said, Christ's Sermon on the Mount fills me with bliss even today. Its sweet verses have the power to quench my agony of soul.

He read from the Sermon on the Mount every day and found in it the inspiration for his non-violent resistance movement. But while some people have been inspired by the Sermon on the Mount, others have found it intimidating.

Jesus says things like, If your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. Now he didn't mean that literally, but still, it's a very serious statement. Or, if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other also.

Or, you must be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect. Or, do not be anxious about your life. Do not be anxious about tomorrow.

[3 : 46] Period. And at the end, he says, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my father, who is in heaven.

And, several years ago, there was an English professor named Virginia Stem Owens at a large university down in Texas. And she assigned the Sermon on the Mount to her freshman English class.

It was part of a, it was sort of a great books class in the history of literature and ethics. And she asked him to write brief response papers. Here are what some of the students wrote. One student wrote, Another student said, So we might say that throughout history, people have had a love-hate relationship with the Sermon on the Mount.

And with Jesus, himself. On the one hand, we're attracted by its vision of the good life. On the other hand, we're overwhelmed by its uncompromising moral demands.

Now, if you look at the Sermon on the Mount, and you take it seriously, the one thing that is really hard to do is remain neutral and complacent. And say, eh, whatever.

[5 : 22] If you really read this, you can't say that. And Jesus, in the end, he insists that there are two ways to go.

And there is no third way in the middle. There's a narrow road that leads to life, or there's a broad road that leads to destruction. There's a house built on the rock, and there's a house built on the sand.

And the house built on the rock survives the storm, and the one built on the sand collapses with a great crash. Jesus insists that a decision must be made one way or the other, and you can't be neutral.

So over the next three months, we want to dive into Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and really wrestle with it. And seek to hear and be affected by what Jesus is saying.

So we're going to go through it part by part. But tonight, I want to give you the big picture. Because when people read the Sermon on the Mount, as well as some other parts of the Bible, sometimes you can lose the forest for the trees.

[6 : 28] Okay, you can ask, well, what does it mean when Jesus says you should not take any oaths? Does that mean you shouldn't swear on the Bible if you have to testify in court?

You know, if you start there, with those kind of picky questions, you can miss the whole point. But I want to give us the big picture that will help put all the details into perspective.

And the big picture theme is this. The Sermon on the Mount describes what life looks like when Jesus brings us into God's kingdom by his grace.

It's a description of life in God's kingdom when we've been called in by grace, by Jesus' grace. Now, I want to step back for a minute and sort of set this in the whole story of the Bible.

In the Old Testament, the people of Israel were slaves in the land of Egypt. And they were under the rule of a cruel king, Pharaoh, who wanted to abuse them and use them and kill them.

[7 : 38] And they were helpless. They couldn't do anything to rescue themselves, but they cried out to God, and God heard their cry, and God came and listened to them and brought them out. And in Exodus chapter 19, he says, I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself.

And he said, now you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. In other words, set apart people for myself. So God saved them by his grace and brought them into his kingdom.

And then what happens next? Then he says, well, since you're part of my kingdom, instead of that cruel tyrant Pharaoh's kingdom, since you're part of my kingdom now, I want to teach you what it means to live with me as your king.

A life that reflects my character and my ways and my purposes in the world. So he led them to Mount Sinai, and Moses went up the mountain to receive the law from God, and then he gave them the law, beginning with the Ten Commandments and going on from there.

So the law wasn't God saying to the people, here's what you have to do to live up to the standard, and if you live up to the standard, then I'll accept you. No, he had already saved them by his grace, brought them into his kingdom, and he gave them the law to teach them how to live in his kingdom.

[9:02] Now, if you look at the book of Matthew, the reason why I'm doing all this background, you see the same pattern in the first chapters of the book of Matthew. If you want to flip back a little bit, Jesus' life actually follows many of the same patterns of Moses.

So when Jesus is born, the people of Israel are under the rule of a cruel king named Herod. Chapter 2, verse 13 through 18 describes this.

And Herod actually targets Jesus and wants to kill him. Just like Pharaoh targeted the Hebrew babies and Moses in Exodus. But God preserved Moses and he preserves Jesus.

Then, chapter 2, verse 13, Jesus actually goes down to Egypt with his family and then he is brought back to the land of Israel. And Matthew points out that that's a fulfillment of this pattern of the Old Testament that follows the same pattern as the story of Israel being brought out of Egypt by God.

Then you go on, chapter 4. It says Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Well, isn't that the same thing that happened to the Israelites, right? When they left Egypt, where did they go? They went in the wilderness for 40 years.

[10:15] And Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights. So we see many of the same patterns except that in the Old Testament, the people of Israel failed in the wilderness, but Jesus is perfectly faithful to God in the wilderness.

Now we get to chapter 4. Jesus calls people out to follow him. He says, repent, chapter 4, verse 17, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And then he calls his disciples to follow him. And eventually he calls 12 disciples just like there were 12 tribes of Israel. So you see, Jesus is following this same pattern of God calling people out by his grace, rescuing them by grace, and calling them into his kingdom.

Notice how Jesus calls his disciples in verses 18 through 22, which we read earlier. Jesus doesn't set up interviews to interview a long list of candidates and figure out who's best fit for the job.

He doesn't recruit lots of people to fill out applications. He's not like a college admissions office. Right? They want to recruit as many people as they can to apply so that they can lower their acceptance rate so that they can be seen as the most exclusive among all the schools.

[11:41] Jesus doesn't do that. He just sees people and he calls them personally, intentionally, and effectually.

He says, follow me and I will make you fishers of men. In other words, I will be your resume.

I will be the one who qualifies you for the job. And he says, drop everything and follow me. And that's true for everyone who comes to follow Jesus, that Jesus has called you by his grace into his kingdom.

You know, if you want to follow Jesus, you don't have to prove yourself. Instead, it's exactly the opposite. All that you need is nothing.

All that you need is to recognize your need for Jesus and to cling to him. And Jesus says, I will make you what I've called you to be.

[12:51] You're not what you need to be, but I will make you fishers of men. I will make you what I've called you to be. And that is very encouraging. Let me just stop for a moment.

If you're a follower of Jesus, this should be very encouraging that God has called you by his grace. He's reached out to you personally and intentionally and affectionately.

He's brought you in to his kingdom. And he said, I want you to follow me. I see you and I will make you what I've called you to be.

It's a beautiful thing. You can't live up to it on your own. You can't qualify it for it on your own. You can't prove yourself because we are all sinners and we all fall short. But he has called us into his kingdom.

So now we come to chapter 5. The Sermon on the Mount. And what Jesus does here is he tells us this is what it means to live in my kingdom.

[14:00] This is actually the first of five large sections of Jesus' teaching in the Gospel of Matthew. Chapter 5 through 7 is the Sermon on the Mount. Chapter 10 he sends the disciples out on mission.

Chapter 13 is parables about the kingdom. Chapter 18 is teaching about the community of believers. Chapter 24 and 25 is about the coming of the Son of Man. The point is there's these five large sections of Jesus' teaching and many people think and I think it's likely that Matthew deliberately arranged his book this way.

That just as there were five books of Moses in the Old Testament that comprise the law or the teaching for the people of Israel. In Matthew Jesus has five large sections of teaching that summarize his teaching for the church for those who follow him.

And it's reinforcing this theme of Jesus as sort of the new Moses the deliverer and the teacher of God's renewed people. So chapter 5 verse 1 seeing the crowds he went up on the mountain again just like Moses went up Mount Sinai Jesus goes up the mountain and then he sat down that was the typical posture of a teacher back then and he and his disciples the word disciple simply means a student or a follower means someone who listens.

His disciples his students came to him and he opened his mouth and taught them. Jesus is deliberate and earnest and his words have weight and authority to them. So just like Moses taught the people of Israel how to live as God's people rescued by his grace and brought into his kingdom Jesus is teaching his disciples he's teaching us what it means to live in his kingdom when we've been brought in by his gracious call.

[16:06] So from this we can see a couple of things that the Sermon on the Mount is not and some people think this is what it is but it's not this the Sermon on the Mount is not a list of general ethical principles that are common to all religions and that can be put into practice apart from belief in Jesus.

Now it's true there are parallels to many of the individual teachings in other religious traditions that's true but that's not actually the main point.

It's not simply meant to be a general list of ethical principles set up that are just as relevant apart from Jesus. It's not like you know if you go to a Chinese restaurant and get fortune cookies at the end they have those little sayings those little proverbs on them you can sort of take it or leave it and they don't you know there's one at a time and you never know what you're going to get and they're totally random that's not what the Sermon on the Mount is.

It's not a random collection of wisdom for life that you can sort of take what you like and leave the rest and it's not something that we can simply admire from a distance like a beautiful sunset.

Jesus is describing what our lives can and must increasingly look like when we're part of his kingdom. It's marching orders from the king if you want to put it that way.

[17:34] It's an authoritative teaching for us who are Jesus' disciples. So that's sort of the background leading up to the Sermon on the Mount.

Now let me briefly walk you through chapters five through seven. So again if you've got a Bible this is a good one to flip through. There are two major parts to the Sermon on the Mount.

There's first a general part. Jesus starts in chapter five verses three through sixteen by telling his disciples who we are in general as people saved by his grace and belonging to his kingdom.

So if you read the Beatitudes in chapter verse three through twelve they all start with this word blessed or blessed. In other words we're to be blessed means to receive God's favor and his delight.

Means that God delights in you and that you share in that joy and delight. And the first Beatitude is the key to all the rest.

[18:43] It says blessed are the poor in spirit. In other words blessed are those who admit that they have nothing to prove themselves to God.

Again we come empty handed and Jesus gives us his joy and delight and blessing. And then Jesus goes on to say blessed are the poor in spirit.

Those who have nothing in themselves and find everything we need in Jesus. And he goes on to say blessed are those who are persecuted. Who have nothing in this world. But who love Jesus and belong to the kingdom of heaven.

It's a pretty amazing promise. Right? I mean almost everything else in this world you have to qualify for in some way or other.

You have to prove that you're eligible for this. And Jesus says if you've got nothing I've come to give you everything you need.

[19:45] and I've come not just to give you bare subsistence but I've come to bring you joy and delight. Because I'm the fountain of those things.

So we're blessed as part of Jesus' kingdom. Then verse 13 and 16 this is again sort of the more general part about who we are. He uses three metaphors the salt of the earth the light of the world and a city on a hill.

And all three of those metaphors were used in the Old Testament for the people of God. And all three of them remind us that as Jesus' followers we're not taken out of the world.

Jesus isn't talking about leaving this physical universe but he is calling us to be distinct from the patterns of the world that we live in.

And Jesus explains this further later on in the Sermon on the Mount. If you read through the sermon I encourage you read through the whole of chapters 5 through 7 sometime this week and just notice some of the general patterns that run through these chapters.

[21 : 02] And you'll see there were two contrasts that stuck out to me. Two of the contrasts that stuck out to me here when I read it through. So on the one hand Jesus says if you're my disciples you are not to be just like the religious people of the day.

The Pharisees and scribes. In chapter 6 he describes them as hypocrites who do their good works in order to gain praise from other people.

Or as self-righteous critics who are always looking for minor flaws in other people but are blind to their own more serious failings. And Jesus says that's not what life in God's kingdom is meant to be.

It's not simply what people might stereotype religion to be. On the other hand Jesus says don't be like the Gentiles.

Don't be like sort of the secular world. Who are ultimately self-centered in their life apart from God.

[22 : 11] Jesus calls his disciples to a higher standard than either traditional religion or the secular culture. Now Jesus says I'm calling you to something greater than both of those.

Your righteousness must surpass the Pharisees and scribes because it's dealing with your heart before God and your love must be greater than the people of this world.

It must extend even to your enemies. So Jesus calls us to something greater than life in this world. To life in God's kingdom. So that's the first major section.

Jesus saying this is who you are and this is what your relationship to the world is meant to look like. The second section of the Sermon on the Mount is starting at chapter 5 verse 17 and going to the end of chapter 7.

And this tells us how we're to live in God's kingdom in more particular areas. So the point is our identity as disciples of Jesus should shape every part of our lives.

[23 : 21] And you know if you read through this sermon it's very comprehensive. Jesus teaches on anger, lust, marriage, divorce, truthfulness, love, forgiveness, prayer, giving, fasting, worrying about money, worrying about the future, being judgmental of others, and asking God for good gifts.

I mean that's a pretty comprehensive list of a lot of things that we deal with. He teaches about inner attitudes and motives as well as external actions and relationships.

So if you want to learn practically what does it mean to be a Christian? If you want to grow in your life with Jesus read this sermon on the mount.

Dig into it because it'll get at lots of different parts of your life and you won't be able to escape without having nearly your whole life changed and impacted by Jesus.

Jesus. If you're meeting with somebody maybe who's a new Christian who's just starting to follow Jesus, this could be a great passage of scripture to read through together and talk through together.

[24 : 45] It's where Jesus began with his disciples. Matthew put it right at the start of his gospel. And it's not a bad place for us to begin either. As we teach one another what does it mean to live in the kingdom of God by the grace of Jesus Christ.

Now I'm not going to go through this second section in detail. The rest of chapter 5 is about obeying God's law from our heart. Chapter 6 is about trusting God as our father.

And chapter 7 is about living in the fear of the Lord. Those are sort of the big themes that we'll see throughout those sections. But I want to fast forward to the end a little bit.

So look toward the end of chapter 7. At the end, Jesus challenges us with four contrasts.

Chapter 7 verse 13 and 14 he says there are two roads. Well, there are two gates. gates. The narrow gate and the wide gate. The narrow road and the wide road.

- [26 : 02] And then he says there are two trees in the next section. Every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.
- And then he goes on in 21 through 23. He says there are two kinds of people. The people who say to me, Lord, Lord, and the people who do the will of the father.
- And finally, 24 through 27, he says there are two houses. There's a house built on the rock and the house built on the sand. And only one will survive God's judgment in the end.
- You see, this is a challenging sermon. Because at the end, Jesus pushes the issue. He says, you can't stay neutral. There's no third way.
- There are only two ways. You're either on one road or the other. He pushes the issue. He says, whose kingdom are you living in? Who are you living for?
- [27 : 03] And where is your life going? And he says, come to me and follow me. You see, Jesus is teaching the disciples about what it means, those who had been called to him and were committed to follow him.
- And he's saying, this is what it means to live in my kingdom. But you know, he also had a ton of other people who were listening. The people in the crowds. There were whole crowds who followed Jesus around, but they weren't committed.
- They were interested. They were curious. They saw his miracles. They probably wanted to see more miracles. They wanted to experience some of his power, but they weren't yet committed and loyal to him.
- So the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus asks us that question. He'll be asking us that question throughout this summer as we look into it.
- He says, are you a disciple? Have you been called, have you responded to my call to follow me?
- [28 : 14] me? Have you become part of my kingdom? Totally by his grace? Or are you interested but still on the outside?
- And the invitation is, if you're interested but still on the outside, the invitation from Jesus is, come and follow me, and I will make you what I've called you to be.
- Jesus says, in my kingdom, there's great blessing and there's great joy and it'll last forever.
- And outside, there's no hope and everything will perish. let's pray. Lord Jesus, we pray that as you called the first disciples, that you would be calling us to you.
- Lord, we thank you Lord, for those of us who have been called to you, we pray that we would hear your voice. Lord, that your Holy Spirit would work in us, that you would teach us more and more what it means to reflect your character and your ways in this world that we live in.
- [29 : 50] Lord, we pray that you would teach us this summer of who you are. As we look into this Sermon on the Mount. And make us who you've called us to be.
- May this be part of how you are making us what you've called us to be. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.