

# Jesus teaches us how to lead a prioritised life

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you'd like to turn in Matthew chapter 5, though we're going to be concentrating on the five discourses in Matthew, a discourse is simply where Jesus has a spell of teaching and there are five major ones.

In fact, if you have a Bible this morning that has the words of Jesus in red, if you have one of those types of Bibles, if you flick through the Gospel of Matthew, you'll be able to see quite clearly five big sections of red letters, red words.

And those big sections are known as the five discourses of Jesus through the Gospel of Matthew. Now, we don't have time to read all of them and so I'm going to just introduce those discourses, those teaching sections of Jesus by drawing your attention to how the first one began.

And so Matthew chapter 5, verse 1, and we're just going to read a couple of verses, that's all, just a couple. So seeing the crowds, now hear the word of God, seeing the crowds, he went up onto the mountain and when he sat down, his disciples came to him and he opened his mouth and taught them saying.

Okay, this verse 2 is really the sort of key point to the whole of Matthew, that Jesus opens his mouth and teaches us, of course, with words.

[ 1 : 39 ] And we ask God to bless his written word and we also ask to bless him, to bless the message upon it. And we'll come back to God's word after we have worshipped God in song once more.

Amen. If you could open your Bibles again to Matthew chapter 5.

And as you're doing that, I want to begin with quite an important distinction. And that is, it's really important that as you read the Gospels, that you appreciate that Jesus is fully God, but you also appreciate that Jesus is fully man and don't do anything to deny his humanity.

One of the ways that Jesus' humanity is denied is normally in the material things, whenever a Christian talks about material things, but normally they deny the humanity of Jesus by trying to defend the fact that he is God.

I'll give you a simple example. You'll know the account when the woman touches the garment of Jesus and Jesus turns around and says, who touched me?

[ 3 : 14 ] Now, the natural Christian reaction to something like that would be, well, Jesus must have known because he is God. And so you elevate the fact that he is God, but you do so in a way that denies his humanity the fact that he may not have known.

Jesus even says himself that there are some things he doesn't know. Namely, at the time that he, that God the Father has set for the Son to return.

Jesus didn't know. He didn't know when that would be. And that's, he didn't know because he was fully human as well as fully God. So I can understand why Christians do it.

They want to defend the sovereignty of God in Christ Jesus, but sometimes they do it in a way that denies the humanity of Jesus. It's really important for a couple of different reasons.

Because Jesus teaches us in human form, not from heaven, but he comes down to earth and he lives a very physical life with the same material needs that we have.

[ 4 : 24 ] Sleep. There's plenty of situations in the gospel where Jesus is sleeping. A time alone in prayer with God. There's plenty of times where we see Jesus doing that.

Why? Well, because he lives a very physical existence. Now, this will become increasingly apparent, especially as we get to the end of Matthew, when Jesus makes every one of his disciples missionaries.

And I've often said that a missionary, you know, we want to define missionaries as someone that goes overseas. But from the missionaries' point of view, we're overseas.

So to someone, everybody's overseas. And from Jesus' point of view, in the Great Commission, he calls us all to be missionaries, the Great Co-mission.

And that's important, but it's important that you understand the humanity of Jesus and the deity of Jesus to understand why what he's saying makes a difference to priorities.

[ 5 : 32 ] So the issue that we have before us this morning is to understand why Jesus takes priority in our life and why Jesus is able to show us how to live a prioritized life before God.

Okay? So why Jesus takes priority and how Jesus shows us how to live a prioritized life before God.

You know, I grew up at a time where it was fashionable to say in evangelical training circles, colleges, seminaries, and what have you, that it's all about Jesus.

Even in the church, it's quite fashionable to defend your evangelicalism by saying it's all about Jesus. Jesus. But is it? But is it? And that's what the priority of Jesus questions us.

You know, we know the right things to say, but the issue is not saying them anymore. Because priorities work out in an order of life. And this is the things that Jesus gets to.

[ 6 : 34 ] So I'm going to give you a summary as we begin. Matthew is known for five teaching sections of Jesus. These are known as discourses. The first one being the Sermon on the Mount.

The second one being Jesus is giving instructions to his disciples to go out and preach the gospel. That's the second discourse. The third one, which we get to, which is a fairly long segment in end of Matthew 12 into Matthew 13, is about the kingdom of heaven.

That it's not fast, but slow. It arrives slowly. But it does arrive. The fourth one is the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church.

And then the fifth discourse is the Olivet Discourse, named because it was given on the Mount of Olives, where Jesus is teaching about the end times.

So there are five big teaching segments through the whole gospel of Matthew. And those are the five. So Matthew wants us to understand, almost straight off the bat, very, very clearly, that the gospel of Matthew prioritizes the authority of the words of Jesus above the words of anybody else.

[ 7 : 51 ] It gives priority to the authority of Jesus' teaching above the teaching of anybody else that you have heard, either before Jesus or even after Jesus.

Matthew is drawing our attention to the fact that the words of Christ should take priority in our life. Now, we see this in Jesus himself in the Sermon of the Mount, where he will say things like, You have heard it said, but I say unto you.

In other words, I know that other people have taught these things, but I'm bringing the correction. I'm bringing the clarity to what has been taught before.

It's not that it's all wrong, but it does need addressing. It does need shaping up. Now, of course, when someone is told something wrong, but they don't know that it's wrong because they don't know, they can believe something that's wrong believing it's the truth.

That's the problem with things not coming out clearly or truths not being proclaimed. If people are unaware that something is wrong, then they can believe that something is wrong, but actually believe it in such a way that they believe it's right.

[ 9 : 04 ] So when Jesus says, You have heard it said, but I say unto you, he's correcting wrong beliefs. He's correcting wrong understandings with the right one. But people are quite happy, for a number of different reasons, to believe alternative things, because when Jesus teaches with authority, it brings with it the challenge that Jesus has said it.

It's a bit like children in the home who says, Well, who says we couldn't have that? Well, he said it we couldn't have. Yeah, and then when it gets to mum, well, now it needs to be taken seriously. Because there's a hierarchy of voices. There's a hierarchy of authority. And if mum says, then it goes.

It very rarely gets to the dad, because as all husbands know, they simply subvertently do the will of their wives.

But being one who wants to affirm Christian manship in the home, I try my very hardest. The issue that we have before us then is this.

[ 10 : 15 ] Do you take the authority of Jesus seriously, or do you take it with a pinch of salt? In other words, if Jesus is speaking, and you understand what Jesus is saying, what are you going to do about it?

And the reason why this is important is because Jesus speaks to us from a practical, physical, material life, and not from heaven. And therefore, to sort of use practical, material things to say, well, we don't fit in the same category because Jesus is not talking to us in that category, is wrong. Jesus is a physical man in a material world who lives his life accordingly to the priorities of God, or as it's put, the will of God.

As Jesus then, here in Matthew 5, steps up to the mount and sits down and begins to teach, he gives us a picture that every Bible reader has seen before.

All of a sudden, we go, oh, we've seen this film before. And the film is of Moses going up to Mount Sinai and receiving the law of God and then bringing it down to the people of God.

[ 11 : 25 ] Jesus, and Matthew, is portraying Jesus as the new Moses, as the new law giver. You have heard it said, but I say unto you. Jesus affirms this by saying, I have not come to abolish the law, but I've come to fulfill it.

In other words, we saw how the turning of the cheek, the reason why it's important to turn the cheek and receive the second slap rather than give the second slap is because a second hit needs to happen.

According to the law, it's an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. But what Jesus is saying in his teaching is don't give the second, receive the second.

In other words, fulfill the law, but fulfill the law by receiving it rather than giving it. That way, the law is fulfilled. It's not taken any notice of, but it's fulfilled in a way that shows sacrifice and taking the place of the other person.

And Jesus exemplifies this, of course, when he goes to the cross. What is Jesus doing on the cross if he's not taking the second slap? Okay, it's not a, the cross is not an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, is it?

[ 12 : 36 ] The cross is Jesus taking that himself, not dishing it out to us, but actually taking it himself upon the cross. So, prioritize.

In order to live a life, that prioritizes Christ, this means that it has a certain order to it. And Jesus lays out this order beginning in the Sermon on the Mount.

Following God has an order to it. It has a priority. And what happens when we come into a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is that we have our cupboards stacked in a particular order, and Jesus comes into the home and stacks them in a different order.

Now, this causes great frustration to us because we've lived our whole life, this is the order that we live to, and Jesus comes along and says, but there's now a new order in town.

Okay, a new focus, a new priority. What does that mean? Well, it means that the life that Jesus calls us to is a life that is meant to seek first the kingdom of God, but not without blessing.

[ 13 : 47 ] See, we're not to believe that God withholds things, but we are to understand that God does withhold things. How can both be true? Well, very simply, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.

It's not that God withholds, but he gives them in order. And so, we're waiting for number 8, 9, and 10, okay, but we've jumped 2, 3, and 4.

Okay, and so, we think we then have a relationship with God where he doesn't give what he promises. No, God always gives what he promises. If God has said, seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you, then we must believe God and believe that all these things will be added unto you.

So, now we're here living our Christian life and going, well, none of those things have been added unto me. Okay, God's a liar. No, no, God said, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Are you doing it? And some Christians will go, no, I'm not. And some Christians will go, I don't know how to. And that's a process of learning.

[ 14 : 59 ] That's a process of coming under the authority of Jesus, under his word, submitting to it and go, right, if I don't know how to, I need to learn how to. And if I know how to and I'm not, then I need a reordering of the priority.

Okay? Because God doesn't withhold, he just gives things in order. And that's the promise that Jesus spells out in the Sermon on the Mount. He also spells out that when we get the order right, a person is able to be free from anxiety.

When a person has the order right, seeking first the kingdom of God, trusting God above all things, rather than immaterial things, then God will add all these things unto the believer, which will then

free them from the anxiety that they feel about the present or about the future.

Easier said than done. Granted. But it's still an issue of priority. It's still an issue of God blessing according to his order. God blessing according to his set of priorities.

So a Christian wants to be free from the anxiety that they feel, which should be a clear indication in their life, or at least part of an indication in their life, that there might be something wrong with how they're prioritizing things.

[16:18] There might be something up here. Very similar, as you can read in the rest of the New Testament, if a husband is not getting his prayers answered by God, what is the first thing he should do?

Well, if you've read the New Testament, he needs to go and check whether or not his relationship with his wife is good. If there's any sin there. Because the New Testament clearly teaches us that if a man is not right with his wife and there's sin present, God doesn't answer his prayer.

He will not answer his prayers. So here we have a man who doesn't get his prayer answers by God, thinking that this is a thing between him and God, when actually it's a thing between him and his wife. Okay?

God works according to his priorities. This means we learn. In other words, we listen to Jesus' sermons. Okay?

Jesus preaches, and we listen, and we submit, and we trust his words. Now, Jesus calls us at the end of all of his teaching, partway through in Matthew, but his final conclusion is this, that as he looks out onto people, he sees men, women, boys, and girls like sheep without a shepherd.

[17:30] They're lost. In other words, people do not know naturally what direction to go in. They will follow others, and they will move in a direction, but they themselves don't know the direction that they go in, hence why trends become fashionable, hence why history is cyclical, hence why perhaps fashion brands and so forth are cyclical as well.

They go round and round in circles eventually because everyone is following everybody else until they've got to the extent of everything, and then it all starts over again.

Jesus says, there you have it. People are like sheep without a shepherd. They need someone to listen to, and they need someone to lead them, and we know, of course, hopefully, that Jesus is the great shepherd of the sheep, and the illustration that Jesus gives, of course, in his day is that a shepherd is one who walks before the sheep, and the sheep follow because they hear the shepherd's voice.

Okay? In this country, we're used to sheep, dogs, and whistles, and even four-wheel carts, and they come in behind the sheep to sort of squeeze them into a pen, but back in the days of Jesus, the way that it worked is the shepherd walks ahead, he speaks, and the sheep that follow do so because they hear the shepherd's voice, and those who don't, well, what do you think happens to them?

Well, they get lost, and Jesus got a parable about that very thing. The sheep that is lost, you've still got to ask yourself the question, well, how did he get lost? Okay?

[19:13] He is a lost sheep, but it would be wrong to start there, even though Jesus starts there, he starts there elsewhere in other parts of Scripture. Sheep get lost because they don't listen.

Jesus comes and gets us, sure, but they get lost because they're not listening to the words of Jesus. In other words, Matthew wants to point out, and he does so with the five discourses, beginning with the Sermon on the Mount, that the words of Jesus must take priority over every other person's words, and therefore, will.

Now, you've got two battles here then to face. Battle number one, Jesus is will, and the will of God, and the words of God must take priority over your own. Okay?

Now, for those of us who don't have a problem with that, might have a problem with a second challenge, and that is the person that we're married to. That is the person that we're friendly with. In other words, we may not have a great difficulty of putting Jesus first when it's just us, but we may have a huge difficulty of putting Jesus first when we're related to a person who doesn't want to put Jesus first.

[20:22] Now, what Jesus is saying at that point is that the will of God takes priority not only over your will and your words, but over your friends as well. Now, this can lead to either the strengthening of relationships or, of course, relationships falling apart.

When a person prioritizes Jesus in their life, it means that other people and other things automatically become demoted, and nobody in the world enjoys demotion. Nobody in the world enjoys being taken down a peg or two, but that's what the priority of Jesus means. Jesus comes into the world and he reorders. He takes off our peg and puts us down one, and then he addresses all the things in our life that now have to be reordered. And the reason why the strain in relationships happen, especially if you're committed to following Jesus, is because it's an issue of priority. Who are you going to put first, and more importantly, why? Why? Why? So, some idols have to be destroyed, okay, and others have to be demoted, okay?

[ 21 : 36 ] If my wife is my idol, that is, if I love my wife more than I love the Lord Jesus Christ, and I'll pick on me and my wife so that you know that I'm not addressing anybody else here. Now, Jesus obviously doesn't want me to destroy my wife. He doesn't want me to get rid of the idol through destruction. Now, if it was a golden image sat in the living room, okay, what do you think Jesus is going to say? He's going to say, take a sledgehammer to it and throw it in the bin. Get rid of it. But if it's your wife, which is a good thing from God, and yet that's taken first place, what happens then? Am I to destroy that? No, but it has to be demoted. It has to be demoted. Why? Because Jesus takes first place. So, some idols have to be destroyed, okay? And some idols have to be demoted. Either way, they are demoted accordingly to the will of God and the priority of Christ in our lives. So, we find this difficult, not when it's just our relationship with Jesus, but normally when we have a relationship with Jesus and we have a relationship with other people.

[ 22 : 45 ] Jesus can easily go from number one to number three in a matter of one decision. As quickly as that. Jesus, the Lord of all, it's all about Jesus, can go from number one to number three or five or ten in one or two decisions. So, how then am I supposed to understand the priorities of Jesus so that I can reorder the priorities of my life? Well, this is how Jesus does it. when Jesus sets out the kingdom of heaven, he then automatically puts things in order, namely first that eternal things are more important than material things. You are to seek ye first the kingdom of God and its righteousness and you are to store up treasure. And people go, you know, Jesus didn't say you're allowed to, no he did. What he said was, is send your treasures ahead. Don't store up your treasure on earth where moss and rust can destroy. Store them up in heaven. Okay, store up your treasure but send them ahead. And the treasures are of eternal value not material value. So, Jesus is readdressing the idea of not that treasure is bad but what treasure is good compared to what treasure is bad.

[ 24 : 07 ] And where you are to actually do the storing. The other thing that we notice then is that because Jesus is fully God and fully man we can't spiritualize the humanity of Jesus away as if to say that the type of life that Jesus lived physically and materially is not the life that I'm meant to follow. See, we want to have the material things that we do by spiritualizing everything that Jesus did. So, we make everything about spiritual matters. Everything becomes about forgiveness. Everything becomes about grace and mercy and spiritual dynamics and dimensions and all that. All of that which is true. But sometimes that can be done at the extent where you're denying the humanity of Jesus that walked this earth with very few clothes, nowhere to live, nowhere to lay his head, he said, and very few material things to his possession. We're to be like Jesus. Don't spiritualize it. Don't spiritualize the material away by affirming the spiritual. And that's one of the ways that we go wrong when it comes to priorities.

[ 25 : 22 ] We prioritize worship. Okay? Hopefully, we prioritize prayer. We understand where they fit in the list. But then as the list gets further down, suddenly these material things are in places and positions where they shouldn't be. And it's not that God doesn't want to enjoy us to enjoy material things. He wants us to enjoy the world in all of its blessings. But again, they must be enjoyed in order. If a person then truly understands the humanity of Jesus, then it means that they understand that the humanity of Jesus sets forth its own priorities.

I am deeply convicted that every time I think it would be nice to one day to own my own home or to think about the future of where am I going to live when my ministry comes to an end if it ever comes to an end.

Hopefully, it doesn't. What's going to happen then? The only comfort that I have is to remind myself that I was saved and I follow a homeless man. That's the only thing that keeps me in check.

[ 26 : 28 ] Why? Because my heart can wander after the material things just like anybody else's. And the only thing that keeps me on the straight and narrow is to remind myself constantly that Jesus was a man, a homeless man who saved me.

In other words, the priorities of Christ are to permeate every area and every order of our life. The challenge here then is a fairly simple one.

don't spiritualize away the teachings of Jesus in such a way where the material things become overlooked, where they go side by side with everything that Jesus teaches.

I'll give you an example. What do you do when Jesus not only reprioritizes things in your life but brings to an end those things that you have had in first place for such a long time that never should have been in first place?

God's people throughout history have always believed that God won't do certain things because he's God. Sure enough, God goes ahead and does them and God's people are like, I didn't see that coming.

[ 27 : 39 ] I'll give you an example. God's people always believed that God would never take the temple away from them because he gave them the temple, especially Solomon's temple.

But the moment God's people loved the temple more than God, what did he do? Take it away from them. Then they rebuilt it and in the days of Jesus you have this now new temple and what are the people doing again?

They're doing exactly the same thing. They love their religious practices, they love going through the religious motions, the temple has become more important than God and what do you think they're thinking? God will never take this away from us and yet you read in the gospel that when Jesus died on the cross, if you read Mark's account brilliantly that as Jesus died on the cross, the camera changes from the cross to the temple and you see the temple curtain torn in two from top to bottom.

What do you think God's saying? Game over. It's an end. I'm taking the very thing away that you've lived your life for. I'm taking it away. Why? Because Christ takes priority.

So never be surprised when the things you think that are coming to you don't actually come to you. And God is doing it for our benefit. He's doing it for our blessing because he wants us to have a life that is reordered to kingdom values, reordered to the priorities of God rather than ordering them the way we want them to be.

[ 29 : 10 ] I'll give you an example. For those who find it difficult to throw things away, we normally put them somewhere. We wrap them up and we find a space to put them hoping that that space is never going to be needed by anyone else ever.

And just recently I had something wrapped up that's been in the matts because there was no space to put it other than this one place that's been wrapped up almost since the day we moved there.

And it's been there. And sure enough this other thing came along. It can only go in one place. And the only place it can go in is the place that my thing occupies. And so this thing that I never, I'm not going to tell you what it is, that I never ever wanted to go out in the garage, guess where it is?

Because when a girl looks up to you with puppy dog's eyes saying, please dad, what are you meant to do? What are you meant to do? And that's how it works.

When you are in love with Christ and you know what God has done for you in Christ, you can't help, but those priorities become reordered as a matter of love and devotion, as a matter of putting Christ first.

[ 30 : 25 ] So this rearrangement, it's not a difficult thing for someone who loves the person who's telling them to rearrange. The commission then that Jesus gives in the end of the gospel is simply this.

Understand what is important to God in this world now that you're a disciple. And it is for you to go out and make more disciples like you or like the way Jesus wants you to be.

That is to seek first the kingdom. All these things will be added unto you. But make sure, make sure you teach them everything that Jesus taught. That's how the great commission finishes.

To teach everything that Jesus taught. So here's the exhortation then as we close. everyone speaks. But the words of Jesus take priority over everyone else's.

This means that as we listen to Jesus, what he says comes first. But it comes first in a way of not listening to him first or even hearing him first.

[ 31 : 30 ] Even if we hear him last, it means that things have to become reordered further down the line. And all of that can be summarized in the one statement that Jesus gives us in the Sermon of the Mount.

Seek first. Seek first the kingdom and his righteousness and all this will be added unto you. God doesn't withhold, he simply gives in order.

Here's the final thought then as we close. There is a clear distinction between a life that belongs to God and a life that doesn't. But Jesus, when he's speaking in the Sermon of the Mount, says that there are three ways to live.

Not two. Number one is a person can live their whole life without God and live the consequences that that brings.

They want nothing to do with God and they live their whole life without God. The other person is the one who lives their whole life with God. In other words, they repent and believe. They understand that the priority of God is to forgive them of their sins.

[ 32 : 33 ] They repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and are brought into relationship with God. God and there's the other person. But then there's the middle person. Not that there's a middle ground because he's with the unbeliever, but he doesn't believe that he's with the unbeliever.

And it's the religious person. It's the guy who goes to church. It's the guy who goes to the temple. It's the guy who goes through all the religious practices. Okay? But he's convinced himself that the religious practices alone are the things that define him as belonging on this side when in fact he's on that side.

Why is that so dangerous? Well, it's dangerous because Jesus said himself, they'll come that day when people will come to me and say, Lord, Lord, and Jesus will turn around and say to them and go, and who are you?

And who are you? So the key distinctive to belonging to Jesus actually permeates life, not our beliefs alone. So the Christian life is not defined in a change of beliefs.

The Christian life is defined in a change of priorities. Okay? I'm going to say that again. The Christian life is not defined in a change of beliefs. The Christian life is defined in a change of priorities.

[ 33 : 52 ] Let me put it with a simple illustration to finish. Why don't we buy and support missionaries to buy fancy cars and beautiful furnished homes with swimming pools and anything else that you might like?

Why don't we do that? I think it would be a good idea. Not really. But why don't we do that? Well, we don't do it because we understand that they're on mission.

Right? But we, back here, okay, in the homeland, as it were, we have all those things. things. But didn't Jesus say, you're on mission as well?

You're on mission as well? In other words, the thing that Jesus is pointing out is that the missionary lifestyle is the lifestyle that should be present in the church for everybody. That missionary mindset of what I need compared to what I would like to have, okay, takes its order in priority because of the priority of Christ and the mission that he has given me.

This means that if we have treated Jesus fairly and correctly, we don't spiritualize him as a way of minimizing his humanity when it comes to the material things.

[ 35 : 17 ] This is why the material things are on the increase in the Western church and have been for a number of years because Christians have spiritualized Jesus in such a way that they have denied his humanity, his very physical existence and practical life and how he has lived.

Jesus at the end of Matthew makes us all missionaries. And with that missionary commission comes the missionary lifestyle, the missionary mindset.

So in the same way you want a missionary, believe a missionary ought to be supported out there on the field, that is the same type of priorities that you should have for yourself over here.

That's the way life should be prioritized. So in short, when Jesus speaks, we listen. When Jesus speaks, we listen.

And we listen in such a way because our Christian life is not just defined by a change of beliefs, it's defined by changing our priorities. Amen.