



# Kingdom Living

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT



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### *About the Cover*

Central to this image is a mountain with its reflection stretching beneath. It brings to mind the teaching Jesus gives us in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), that our lives are to be reflections of the Rock, and not the world around us (1 Corinthians 13:12). The fragmented gold foil emphasizes Jesus as our great refiner and purifier (Malachi 3), and encourages us that whether we are struggling in the darkest depths or meandering on the blessed breeze, indeed He is making all things new (Revelation 21:5)— including us (2 Corinthians 5:17).

*Kingdom Living: The Sermon on the Mount*  
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# Introduction

*Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain,  
and when he had sat down, his disciples came to him.  
And he opened his mouth and taught them. -Matthew 5:1-2*

In one of his earliest written commentaries, St. Augustine (AD 354 - 430) gave the name “Sermon on the Mount” to Jesus’ teaching found in Matthew chapters 5-7. Today, the title remains familiar to many, both Christians and non-Christians, and refers to a passage of Scripture that is often considered to contain the most-loved and best-known—yet arguably the least-understood and least-obeyed—words of Jesus.

It’s on a Galilean mountainside that Jesus provides His followers with the secrets of happiness—what we refer to as Beatitudes—and where a series of, “*You have heard that it was said...*,” statements demonstrate the unattainable standards that go beyond what even the most diligent student of the law would have imposed. Here also Jesus teaches us how to pray (the Lord’s Prayer) and how to treat others (the Golden Rule). It is within this great discourse that we are instructed of our calling as salt, light, trees bearing good fruit, and houses built upon rocks. Where disciples of Christ are encouraged to store treasures in heaven, be not anxious, judge not. We ask, we seek, we find.

This, and much more, is found within the Sermon on the Mount text that is the focus of our study. We invite each of you to join along, at the feet of Jesus, to listen and reflect upon His instructions. We genuinely believe that while the words Jesus uses are simple, humble, and straightforward, the power contained within them, and the truths they represent, can completely revolutionize our lives as disciples of Christ and transform the lives of those with whom we interact. This is the aim of *Kingdom Living*.

To begin this journey of *Kingdom Living*, there is one question that demands our attention if we are to consider the reality of what Jesus is expecting of us as He delivers this sermon:

How is it that this world-famous sermon can, on one hand, be greatly admired and routinely acknowledged and, on the other hand, have such minimal impact on the daily lives of believers? In other words, how do we reconcile the fact that the Lord provides His followers specific instructions for kingdom living, yet many, perhaps most, are not interested in attempting to live according to these instructions?

More direct is the observation by Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones (reformed Welsh preacher and minister at Westminster Chapel in London for thirty years), who said about Matthew 5-7, “Our Lord taught these things and he expects us to live them; why do we refuse?”<sup>1</sup>

As we each consider a personal response to this question, I would suggest there is one underlying explanation. Though we may desire to grow in Christ-like discipleship, the reason that we don’t recognize our lives as being aligned with the kingdom-living message of the Sermon on the Mount is because its teaching is the most challenging, uncomfortable, counter-cultural, intentionally-selfless, and unpopular instruction that Jesus teaches anywhere in the Gospels. We can appreciate how it sounds on the ears, but we find it too difficult to appreciate how it looks and feels in the living out.

However, if we are willing to accept the reality of kingdom living through the Sermon on the Mount, then we are ready to begin the journey. For all its struggle and difficulty, kingdom living promises the blessedness that comes from pleasing the Father and the eternal assurance that comes from knowing Him better and loving Him more. It also offers a more vivid glimpse into our created purpose, that of having been made in His image, as we are moved to more-consistently respond and behave in ways towards others as only Jesus could perfectly model.

Over the next eight weeks, our Sunday sermon series will lead us through these three chapters of Matthew’s Gospel. We encourage you to record your notes, questions, and thoughts in this study guide. After each sermon, use the weekly questions to further your understanding and appreciation for that specific passage.

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<sup>1</sup> R. T. Kendall, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Verse-by-Verse Look at the Greatest Teachings of Jesus* (South Bloomington, MN: Chosen Books, 2011), 17.



In addition to the study questions, each week begins with an excerpt from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's classic *The Cost of Discipleship*. Bonhoeffer, a German pastor and theologian, was put to death by the Nazis during World War II, just weeks before the end of the war in 1945. He lived out the Sermon on the Mount in a way that so few ever do, and he did so under intense persecution, imprisonment, and abuse. I think you will find these short commentaries helpful in experiencing a deeper, richer application of each week's Scripture passage.

At the conclusion of most weeks is a section we have titled *Reflection*. Here you will find a prompt asking that you give thought to your personal engagement with the Scripture. Ideally, this guide can become as much journal as Bible study. In that way, we hope that it greatly benefits your discipleship efforts.

Finally, additional commentary is provided in the following *Know Before You Go* section. These comments reflect thoughts regarding themes, context, and scriptural considerations. It might prove helpful to periodically return to this section for review throughout the study.

The challenge is real. The standard is high. The expectation is unchanging. The Sermon on the Mount allows us the opportunity to recalibrate our daily witness, while also providing great insight into the mercy of God. Along with the life-changing power that accompanies a believer's attempts at kingdom living, we will find the life-transforming power that accompanies God's salvation, closing off all possible avenues of human merit and leaving us with divine grace as the only true faith.

Because Jesus is the *Kingdom Authority*<sup>2</sup>, we have the privilege of *Kingdom Living*. May we find great encouragement—and even greater richness—in our daily pursuit.

In Christ,



David Holcomb  
Minister of Discipleship

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<sup>2</sup> David Beaty and David Holcomb, *Kingdom Authority: The Gospel of Mark*. Ten-week small group study used to accompany 2016 sermon series at River Oaks Community Church.



# Know Before You Go

## Background Details

At this point in His public ministry, the reputation of Jesus had become widespread. Matthew tells us just prior to the introduction of the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus “*went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction of the people. So his fame spread throughout ... and great crowds followed*” (Matthew 4:23-25).

Much as we witnessed in the first act of Mark’s Gospel, Jesus was traveling throughout Galilee and around the sea. He was demonstrating His authority and preaching the message of the good news. He had called His closest disciples and attracted many more because of His actions—interacting with the unclean, demonstrating kindness and compassion, and confronting the religious leaders with their self-righteousness. And like Mark, when we finally have the opportunity to hear what Jesus is teaching, we find it remarkable. And this is how we come to the Sermon on the Mount.

Picking up with the narrative in Matthew 4:24, we are told that Jesus saw the crowds, went up the mountainside, and sat down. Why are we told this, and what does this mean for the context of the sermon?

First, the mountainside is likely a location in Galilee that provided ample space and adequate acoustics. It was not uncommon for teachers to speak from a higher ground to accommodate many people. More important is the description of Jesus’ posture. To sit down as a lecturer indicated that the teacher was one with much authority. The most revered of teachers, rabbis, and lecturers would assume the position before beginning their lesson. The lesser teachers would be asked to sit, or even stand, throughout. It is with Jesus’ kingdom *authority* that He can teach of kingdom *living*.

As for the crowd, of course there were many undecideds and unbelievers in attendance for this sermon. However, we note that it was Jesus’

disciples who came to Him as He begins His discourse. This would indicate that Matthew is referring not only to the twelve, but rather to all who followed and believed. In fact, Matthew 7:28 tells us that “the crowds”—and not simply His small band of brothers—were amazed at His teaching. If this is the case, then—unlike much of prior proclamation of the gospel—this sermon was expressively meant for those who professed Him as Lord. It was directed toward those who call themselves disciples and are interested in living life as a disciple. In a way, Jesus was delivering a Sunday morning message at the Galilean Mountainside Community Church to the members and regular attendees.

Interestingly, both modern and not-so-modern scholars—like John Calvin (early reformer, theologian, and pastor, 1509-1564)—find evidence in Matthew’s writing style and the first-century Judaic teaching customs that the Sermon on the Mount was likely a multi-day event. Many believe that what we have are the leading points and a summary of the most important ideas that were shared. Regardless, one structural element that we do know, is that from a stylistic perspective, the Beatitudes create an introduction, or primary text, that provides a foundation for the remainder of the sermon. In other words, in a general sense, as Jesus unfolds His sermon, it is as if He is applying Matthew 5:1-12. In this way, we notice that the Beatitudes aptly describe who Jesus is, how we come to salvation, and what virtues and values we are to uphold as believers.

Though Jesus’ message is one that touched on many aspects of a disciple’s life, it ultimately provided His listeners with two overarching themes. The two themes may appear to be wrought with tension, but are actually beautifully complimentary and equally important:

- 1) The sermon is an assault on Pharisaic legalism. Throughout, Jesus expounds on the full meaning of the law, explaining the unattainable standard it sets, and thereby describing the use of the law in respect to salvation. By closing with a call to true faith and eternal assurance, Jesus concludes this theme on how impossible it is for humanity to save itself; there is no possible way in regards to merit that one can be saved. Only through the grace of God is salvation possible.

- 2) The sermon demonstrates the kind of kingdom living, with regards to character and conduct, that followers of Christ should strive to model. Jesus teaches us the true fulfillment of Mosaic Law and how it is to be applied in our lives. Importantly, we realize that our ability to uphold this standard—not perfectly, but more consistently each new day—is a result of our dependence upon the Holy Spirit (“...not living according to the sinful nature, but according to the Spirit” Romans 8:4).

In short, the Sermon on the Mount tells us that no one can uphold the law; Jesus has fulfilled it as the only perfect One. His standard is impossible for us to achieve. It is a message of the works of grace. At the same time, the standard is an expectation of our striving. To be called a disciple of Christ is to be passionately devoted to following His teachings within this sermon. To disregard them due to our inability to perfectly live them out is a dangerous and disobedient decision.

These two themes are the focus of our study: an understanding of salvation and of discipleship. As we explore these themes, we will be reminded of our absolute necessity of a new birth, that pure righteousness flows from a transformed heart indwelt by the Holy Spirit, that pleasing the Father brings true happiness. We will be reminded that the preacher of the Sermon on the Mount *is* the Sermon on the Mount. Through our understanding and application of His sermon, we will be brought into the most intimate and most complete understanding of who Jesus is and how we can love Him more.



*And when Jesus finished these sayings,  
the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as  
one who had authority, and not as their scribes. -Matthew 7:28-29*

# Sermon Notes

# Unit 1

## KINGDOM VALUES

### MATTHEW 5:1-12

#### *Kingdom Quotes*

Having reached the end of the beatitudes, we naturally ask if there is any place on this earth for the community which [these beatitudes] describe. Clearly, there is one place, and only one, and that is where the poorest, meekest, and most sorely tried of all men is to be found - on the cross at Golgotha. The fellowship of the beatitudes is the fellowship of the cross. From the crucified there comes the call "blessed, blessed." And so, while Jesus calls them blessed, the world cries: "Away with them, away with them!" Yes, but whither? To the kingdom of heaven. "Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven." There shall the poor be seen in the halls of joy. With his own hand God wipes away the tears from the eyes of those who had mourned upon earth. He feeds the hungry at his Banquet. There stand the scarred bodies of the martyrs, now glorified and clothed in the white robes of eternal righteousness instead of the rags of sin and repentance. The echoes of this joy reach the little flock below as it stands beneath the cross and they hear Jesus saying: "Blessed are ye!" —Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (113-114).

## *Study Questions*

1. The introduction in verses 1-2 sets the scene for our study and our call to a life of discipleship. We find Jesus going up the mountainside and taking a seat—an authoritative position for revered teachers in first-century Jewish culture—where He is followed by disciples. Matthew makes clear that Jesus has a special teaching in store for those believers who followed after Him, desiring to hear His words and seeking to know more about Him. Yes, there were great crowds, and certainly many were not followers, but those for whom this sermon was targeted are the men and women who call Jesus their Messiah and Lord. After Jesus sits down, before He opens His mouth to teach, what do we see the disciples do?

What do these initial verses tell us about a person pursuing one's faith?



Based on Jesus' intended audience, who should believers hold accountable when it comes to the ideals and virtues of this sermon?

Where, and from whom, do we find the most authoritative teaching and instruction when it comes to discipleship?

Use the following list of Beatitudes to answer questions 2 to 5. Respond to each question by considering each Beatitude separately.

i. The poor in spirit -

ii. Those who mourn -

iii. The meek -

iv. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness -

v. The merciful -

vi. The pure in heart -

vii. The peacemakers -

viii. Those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake -

2. The word *blessed* literally means “happy, fortunate, blissful.” As you think about each Beatitude, how does a follower of Christ experience happiness, or a rich “eternal” joy, in ways that run contrary to the world’s ideas about blessedness?
3. The worldly pursuit of happiness is often found in riches, pleasure, abundance, power, and similar things. As you consider each of these attitudes of the heart, given to us by Jesus in verses 3-11, can you identify what the opposite of each Beatitude might be?
4. In what ways can you and I, or better yet, *will* you and I, apply these Beatitudes to our lives? Be specific and think about areas where you associate more closely with the opposite traits (Question 3) than with the scriptural characteristics.
5. Shifting from a practical application of the Beatitudes as guiding principles for a disciple’s life to the representation of God’s role as Savior, how could each of these attributes portray a genuine and necessary aspect of our faith, and not just our obedience. In other words, do we find a teaching of God’s saving grace toward us in these Beatitudes? For example: Perhaps a posture of being “poor in spirit” enables us to receive God’s eternal blessing. His gift of grace may result from our humility and acknowledgement of our need. Record your thoughts and observations.

6. *Peacemaking* should be an extremely important mission for believers in today's world. In the Bible, where "the God of peace" (Romans 15:33) sent Christ "himself as our peace" (Ephesians 2:14), the theme of peace dominates the entire narrative of Scripture. Are we always aware of how available peace is to us?

...how responsible we are in initiating peace in our relationships?

...how we are called to be ambassadors for peace and reconciliation?

Further, in regards to peacemaking: What do the following passages tell us about peace and peacemakers:

- John 16:33
- Philippians 4:6-7
- 2 Corinthians 5:17-18

- Mark 9:50

- Acts 10:36

Think about these two statements and discuss:

- Peace is not simply the absence of conflict; it is the presence of righteousness.
- There is a difference between a truce and genuine peace.



7. A minority of Christian scholars believe the Beatitudes—and for that matter, much of the Sermon on the Mount—describe the ethical principles of the coming heavenly kingdom, rather than an expectation of how believers should strive to live in the here-and-now. Why would you agree or disagree with this position?

Which of the eight Beatitudes disprove this interpretation?

# Sermon Notes

# Unit 2

## KINGDOM PEACEMAKING MATTHEW 5:13-26

### Kingdom Quotes

On Salt - “Ye are the salt.” Jesus does not say: “You must be the salt.” It is not for the disciples to decide whether they will be the salt of the earth, for they are so whether they like it or not. The call of Christ makes those who respond to it the salt of the earth in their total existence.” —Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (116)

On Anger - “The disciple must be entirely innocent of anger, because anger is an offence against both God and his neighbour. Every idle word which we think so little of betrays our lack of respect for our neighbour, and shows that we place ourselves on a pinnacle above him and value our own lives higher than his.” —Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (127)

### Study Questions

1. Thinking back to the Beatitudes of Unit 1, how might disciples of Christ be the “salt” and “light” of the world? Of their own community? Is it possible to be “salt” and “light” without the attitudes expressed in Matthew 5:3-9?

2. Why was the Law given to God's people? What is meant by moral law?

Civil law?

Ceremonial law?

Are we still responsible for upholding these laws today?

3. What did Jesus mean when He said that He did not come to abolish the Law? Does that mean our obligation to the Law remains the same as that of the people living in Old Testament Israel?
4. What did Jesus mean when He said, regarding the Law, "Not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matthew 5:18)?

Does John 19:30 shed a light on this?

5. The Pharisees were well known for their piety and their obedience to the Law. It would have been remarkable to hear Jesus say that one should be more righteous than a Pharisee. Why did He say that?

Do we see any Pharisaic tendencies in the church today?

6. What is Jesus' expectation toward the condition of our relationships, particularly between brothers and sisters of Christ? What does He say about the urgency of reconciliation?

Do we see a pattern of Jesus returning to the Beatitude principles as the means to achieve these expectations? (See Matthew 5:7, 9.)

7. How can Jesus possibly compare our words with murder?

Why might they be an indication of our devotion to Him?

How does this instruction fit into the greater theme of the sermon?

## *Reflection*

In our own strength, we are unable to fully comply with Jesus' command regarding anger. However, through His grace we can strive to live a life with less anger and conflict tomorrow than we exhibited today. Use the space below to record opportunities where you feel called to be a peacemaker, or where you might have a need for reconciliation. Consider the angry and insulting words that are far too common in your daily conversations and write them down as a commitment to pray for the Lord's intervention when you are next tempted to speak with an angry heart.

# Sermon Notes



# Unit 3

## KINGDOM PURITY MATTHEW 5:27-37

### Kingdom Quotes

Instead of trusting to the unseen, we prefer the tangible fruits of desire, and so we fall from the path of discipleship and lose touch with Jesus. Lust is impure because it is unbelief, and therefore it is to be shunned. The gains of lust are trivial compared with the loss it brings - you forfeit your body eternally for the momentary pleasure of the eye or hand. When you have made your eye the instrument of impurity, you cannot see God with it. Jesus does not impose intolerable restrictions on his disciples, he does not forbid them to look at anything, but bids them look on him. If they do that he knows that their gaze will always be pure, even when they look upon a woman. So far from imposing on them an intolerable yoke of legalism, Jesus succors (gives assistance to) them with the grace of the gospel. —Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (131-132).

### Study Questions

1. What is the point of equating adultery with lust?

What difference between the two can lead to our justification of lustful thoughts and behaviors?

2. Aside from the societal, relational, emotional, and physical ills resulting from sexual immorality, what is the central spiritual problem that results when one struggles with these kinds of behaviors?

Can lust be viewed as idolatry? Why or why not?

3. In verses 31-32, Jesus makes a statement against the Pharisees who sought to know how much they could “get away with” when it came to divorce and the requirements of God. Here Jesus reinforces that all divorce grieves God and that consequences endure. However, the mercy of God heals brokenness and—in His love—He offers unconditional forgiveness.

How might you comfort someone, particularly a Christian brother or sister, who has experienced a divorce?

...support someone who is considering a divorce?

...counsel someone who is remarrying following a divorce?

4. If you are married, how might the Beatitudes strengthen your marriage?

5. In Jesus' teaching on oaths, we need to realize that this is not a condemnation of all oaths or vows. This is a direct indictment against the Pharisees' practice of swearing on lesser people and things to deceive and lie for personal gain. In fact, we see God's requirement for oaths throughout the Old Testament, and even Paul gives his word "as God is witness" within his letters (1 Thessalonians 2:5, Galatians 1:20, Philippians 1:8). The bottom line is if we are living a life in accordance with the Beatitude principles, then we will not practice deceitful and false oaths. We will be truthful as if all our words were sworn by God. With this understanding, how might you explain verse 37 to a child?
6. What is the common denominator of verses 34-35? Think about Question 5 and the common practice that Jesus is condemning.
7. Besides taking an oath, what might increase credibility and trustworthiness in a disciple of Christ? Are there active ways of ensuring others believe what you say?

## *Reflection*

Sermon on the Mount Journal: In the space below, record a few thoughts on what you have learned in the first three weeks of our study. Has the Lord provided you with any specific spiritual insight or practical word of encouragement that has furthered your growth? Make a note of what you recall as the general themes in our study and what passages have been especially enlightening. Share these with your small group and/or friends and family.

# Sermon Notes

## Unit 4

### KINGDOM MERCY

MATTHEW 5:38-48

#### *Kingdom Quotes*

To the natural man, the very notion of loving his enemies is an intolerable offence, and quite beyond his capacity: it cuts right across his ideas of good and evil (I would add that it cuts right across modern society's insistence on personal freedoms and individual benefits). The will of God, to which the law gives expression, is that men should defeat their enemies by loving them. Christian love draws no distinction between one enemy and another, except that the more bitter our enemy's hatred, the greater his need of love. In such love there is no inner discord between private person and official capacity. In both we are disciples of Christ, or we are not Christians at all. Am I asked how this love is to behave? Jesus gives the answer: bless, do good, and pray for your enemies without reserve and without respect of persons. —Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (147-148).

## *Study Questions*

1. “An eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth.” Ever heard it? Ever said it? Considering context, read Deuteronomy 19:15-21 and explain how it was supposed to work. Is the penalty in this system judicial or open to personal retaliation?

How do you think the Pharisees were seeking to carry it out in Jesus’ day?

Interestingly, with “eye for an eye,” we forget that God was restricting excessive and abusive punishment with this Old Testament directive, making it more reasonable to the offense. He was not encouraging more severe punishment. Do we tend to limit or encourage excessive punishment to those who offend us on a less criminal—but more personal—level?



2. How do we reconcile verses 39-41 as they relate to pacifism in a time of war?
3. What do the examples in verses 39-42 have in common? Consider the cultural context for each of these and try to develop a present-day example.
4. If love is the central motivator in our treatment of enemies, neighbors, brothers, and sisters, are there times that we might fulfill the principle of love by physically defending ourselves against evil? If that is the case, what might be some examples?

5. Matthew wraps up Jesus' teaching on loving enemies with the instruction to "*be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect*" (verse 48). There are two schools of thought on what is meant by being perfect. Review each, reflect, re-read the Scripture, and discuss.

First, Christ provides an unattainable standard that forces us to realize our reliance on His unmerited grace toward us. It is a standard we are to aim for and pursue, but ultimately one in which we will fall short because we cannot be perfect in this life as He was perfect. This further emphasizes the self-righteousness of the Pharisees and their works-based perfection, as opposed to the less perfect righteousness that Jesus requires from His true disciples.

Second, the word translated "perfect" is the Greek *teleios*, from the verb *teleo*, meaning, "to bring to an end, finish, complete, carry out, accomplish." In context: "anything that fully attains what it is designed to attain, is perfect." An example might be the maturity of an adult man resulting from the aim of a young boy striving to attain adulthood. This understanding might point to our ongoing sanctification, or the maturing of our faith to perfection, as a result of loving as God loves.

6. Have you experienced a personal attack (verbal, physical, professional) like that described in this passage?

Were you able to respond in love toward your attacker? How did you do that?

7. Based on the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, what should be our response to foreigners, strangers, perceived enemies, prisoners, and the oppressed?

Is it a popular position to love the unloved? Though not directly addressed in this passage, what can we imply about our attitudes and actions towards refugees and people of different religions, cultures, and races?

## *Reflection*

In the space below, make a list of those you might refer to as enemies. This could be very personal (use initials if confidential) or a much more broad, global enemy. Once your list is complete, consider what the list is telling you. Are there common traits, experiences, demographics? Pray over your list. If your list is empty, praise the Lord you have no enemies! Pray over someone else's list.

# Sermon Notes

# Unit 5

## KINGDOM SERVICE MATTHEW 6:1-18

### Kingdom Quotes

The better righteousness of the disciples must have a motive which lies beyond itself. Of course it has to be visible, but they must take care that it does not become visible simply for the sake of becoming visible. There are proper grounds for insisting on the visible nature of Christian discipleship, but the visibility is never an end in itself; and if it becomes so we have lost sight of our primary aim, which is to follow Jesus. Genuine righteousness, as with genuine love, is always self-forgetful in the true sense of the word. —Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (157-158, 160).

### Study Questions

1. “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people ...” (Matthew 6:1). Jesus begins with these words and then gives three examples of spiritual practices where this might be a temptation. What are those three areas?

What do they all have in common?

2. What is the primary sin or behavior that these commands address? In a way, what is the central human tendency that propels our need for public promotion of righteous acts?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Is Jesus instructing us to participate in the acts of giving, praying, and fasting?



Or is He simply warning us about our approach “in the event” we decide to give, pray, and fast? How do we know?

4. In what ways must the church be careful not to encourage self-righteous promotion of spiritual disciplines and worship?

What might be the best test for determining the motivation of our service—whether we intend it to be seen by others, or by God alone?

5. In his book, *Accidental Pharisees*, Larry Osborne asserts that in our zeal to live out our faith, if we are not careful, arrogance and self-righteousness can accidentally slip into our lives and become our witness. Can you attest to this in any positive or negative way?

Do you go out of your way to ensure that “your left hand does not know what your right hand is doing” (Matthew 6:3)?

How can we be more intentional and consistent in this way?

6. Jesus introduces us to what we refer to as the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) by warning us how *not* to pray. In what way is that?

Having a better understanding of the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes, does the Lord's Prayer resonate even more now?

What are we praying when we ask, "Thy kingdom come ..."?

7. Verse 14 immediately follows the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer. Although Jesus' teaching is clearly a continuation of the words in the prayer, when we recite the prayer, we rarely include this verse. If we were to take these words as seriously as we should, what impact might that have on our lives?

Is it possible to be an unforgiving disciple?

## Reflection

In reference to Matthew 6:7, Dwight L. Moody (nineteenth-century American preacher and founder of Moody Bible Institute) once said, “A man who prays much in private will make short prayers in public.”<sup>3</sup>

Use the space below to write a heartfelt, private prayer asking God to protect you from public righteousness meant to impress people.

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Ann Jeffreys, comp., “Colorful Sayings from Colorful Moody,” *Christian History* Issue 25 taken from *Christian History Institute* (1990).

# Sermon Notes

# Unit 6

## KINGDOM INVESTING

### MATTHEW 6:19-34

#### Kingdom Quotes

Earthly goods are given to be used, not to be collected. Hoarding is idolatry. Everything which hinders us from loving God above all things and acts as a barrier between ourselves and our obedience to Jesus is our treasure, and the place where our heart is. —Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (175).

After he has been following Christ for a long time, the disciple of Jesus will be asked “Lacked ye anything?” and he will answer “Nothing, Lord.” How could he when he knows that despite hunger and nakedness, persecution and danger, the Lord is always at his side. —Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (181).

#### Study Questions

1. Look for words that are repeated in verses 19-24. Do you see an obvious theme?

Does this theme tie back to the previous passage(s) at all?

2. How do we “*store up treasures in heaven*” today?

How might we check the balance between our collection of earthly possessions and heavenly treasures? Review Mark 10:17-27 or Luke 12:15-21.

3. What is meant by, “The eye is the lamp of the body” (verse 22)? How does Jesus use this analogy to describe our spiritual sight?



How is one deceived into thinking darkness is light (“If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” (verse 23)?

How does this relate to materialism and treasures?

4. The love of money can be a subtle, dangerous, and dark thing. Have you personally struggled with the love of money?

Have you overcome this darkness with light? How did you do it?

What is most tempting about our culture's insatiable appetite for consumerism?

Do you find it difficult to simply want what you need, while the world tells you to need what you want?

What can you do to become a better steward of God's resources, while more consistently setting your mind on the treasures of heaven rather than the possessions of earth?

5. In what ways does worry, or anxiety, undermine our faith?

Obviously, Jesus is not condoning slothfulness or idleness (birds are not lazy), but what is the primary point in verses 25-34?

6. How do you respond to verse 27: “And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” Do you find it comforting, or does it make you more anxious?

How about verse 32? Verse 34?

7. Have you ever heard the song taken from Matthew 6:33, “Seek Ye First”<sup>4</sup>? The lyrics begin:

*Seek ye first the kingdom of God,  
And his righteousness,  
And all these things will be added unto you,  
Allelu, Alleluia*

In context of this teaching, what do the lyrics mean? Consider the connection between salvation and provision.

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<sup>4</sup> Karen Lafferty, “Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness,” Maranatha! Music (admin by Capital CMG Publishing), 1972.

## *Reflection*

Take a few moments to make a list of those things that are currently creating much worry for you or your family. Commit the anxiety into God's care and pray over this list. Recruit your small group or friends to pray over it with you. May the Lord release you from anxiety and liberate you to walk freely in the care and assurance of His great provision.

# Sermon Notes

# Unit 7

## KINGDOM DISCERNMENT

### MATTHEW 7:1-20

#### Kingdom Quotes

Discipleship does not afford us a point of vantage from which to attack others; we come to them with an unconditional offer of fellowship, with the single-mindedness of the love of Jesus. When we judge other people we confront them in a spirit of detachment, observing and reflecting as it were from the outside. Christian love sees the fellow-man under the cross and therefore sees with clarity. Judging others makes us blind, whereas love is illuminating. A disciple's love forces him to ***be as strict in condemning evil in himself as he was before with others, while being as lenient with the evil in others as he was before in himself.***

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (184-185,188).

Judgement is the forbidden objectification of the other person which destroys single-minded love. I am not forbidden to have my own thoughts about the other person, to realize his shortcomings, but only to the extent that it offers to me an occasion for forgiveness and unconditional love, as Jesus provides to me. If I withhold my judgement I am not indulging in (the idea of understanding all and forgiving all) nor confirming the other person in his bad ways. Neither I am right nor the other person, but God is always right and shall proclaim both his grace and his judgement. —Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (185).

## Study Questions

1. Scripture seems to indicate that there is a place for righteous judgment among believers, but never self-righteous, hypocritical, or unfair judgment. In verses 4 and 5, what might the speck and plank represent?

How would you create a role-play scenario from these verses?

2. What is a hypocrite? Does it help to know that it is from the Greek *hypokrites*, meaning “actor.” This is a harsh word, and fitting for this teaching on judgment.



3. Verse 6 admonishes: “Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs.” How do you explain this passage?

What might that look like today?

What do the dogs and pigs represent?

What are the things that are holy? ...the pearls?

4. What is Jesus referring to in verses 7-8 with, “Ask,... seek,...and find?”? What is the promise?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. How is the principle of “doing unto others as you would have done unto you,” a basis for the Law and the Prophets?

What has been taught up to this point in the sermon that this “Golden Rule” might enforce?

Is this rule a good way to make ethical decisions?

6. Aside from being narrow or wide, what else are we told about the two choices facing those seeking entrance into God's kingdom?

If you didn't know the final destination, which gate would be more appealing?

7. Do you find the teaching on the gates to be intimidating or reassuring?

What might it say about the idea of universalism—that *all* will be saved? Would Acts 4:12 aptly describe the narrow way?

## *Reflection*

Did you discover any deeper truths or personal meaning within the more well-known sayings in this passage (i.e., “Judge not, that you be not judged,” “Ask and it shall be given unto you,” The Golden Rule, “Narrow is the gate ...”)? Use the following space to record your thoughts, as well as any follow-up questions that you might have concerning this unit.

# Sermon Notes

# Unit 8

## KINGDOM FOUNDATIONS

### MATTHEW 7:15-29

#### Kingdom Quotes

Here we are at last, here is the secret we have been waiting for since the Sermon on the Mount began. Here is the crucial question - has Jesus known us or not? First came division between Church and world, then the division within the Church, and then the final division on the last day. There is nothing left for us to cling to, not even our confession or our obedience. There is only his word: "I have known thee," which is his eternal word and call. The end of the sermon on the Mount echoes the beginning. The word of the last judgement is foreshadowed in the call to discipleship. It is always *his* word and *his* call, his alone. If we follow Christ, cling to his word, and let everything else go, it will see us through the day of judgement. His word is his grace. —Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (195).

## *Study Questions*

1. Read the following passages regarding false prophets and false teachers: Jeremiah 23:16-18. Matthew 24:24; 2 Corinthians 11:13; 2 Peter 2:1. What kinds of false messages and signs did they bring?

Why would the church need to be aware of them?

What is a result of their presence?



2. If our “fruit” eventually becomes apparent, revealing a true inner self, what kinds of fruit should we look for in false teachers?

What might good fruit look like from teachers?

3. Wisdom and discernment are of great importance when identifying false teachers. Similar to—and just as serious as—allowing a false teacher access to the flock is the disruption of unity and the work in the church body by making false claims against a godly teacher. Without naming names, have you had experiences in your past when you were involved in a church or ministry under the leadership of a false teacher?

What was that experience like?

What would you have done differently?

4. When considering verses 21-23, how is it possible to approach the Lord “*on that day*” and still be rejected as a worker of lawlessness?

Is there a correlation between our adherence to the instruction within the Sermon on the Mount and our assurance of not hearing, “Depart from me”? What appears to be a significant requirement for disciples? (Hint: Re-read Bonhoeffer’s words on this unit.)

5. Why does Jesus instruct us to build our house on rock?

What is the imagery of verses 24-27?

Is there any correlation between this and the narrow gate?

In regards to the Pharisees, what application of “...*and great was the fall of it*” might there be?

6. In verse 29, we again see reference to the word that was the focus of our Gospel of Mark study: *authority*. Is it important here, particularly in His role as a teacher, for Jesus to live out what He teaches? Can you think of other examples when Jesus spoke with authority and lived out the very thing He was speaking of?
  
7. Does this passage of trees (our lives) and fruit (our testimony), standing before the Lord (our lives and our testimony), and building houses (our lives) on rock and sand (our testimony) lead you to consider aspects of your life or testimony that you would like to change?

Are you encouraged in the opportunity to bear good fruit and build upon the rock?

More importantly, are you excited by the opportunity to stand before the Lord on that day and to know Him?

## *Reflection*

Matthew's recording of the Sermon on the Mount is one of the more challenging passages in all of Scripture. In it, we have been instructed to live out this unattainable high standard of discipleship, living as followers of Christ and representatives of His kingdom on earth. Impossible. Yet, in our striving, we find the greatest of happiness and blessedness. We see in this teaching the beautiful picture of grace—offered freely to all who are poor in spirit, meek, hungry, mournful, and such—a gift that the legalistic Pharisees could not comprehend and refused to accept.

In the following space, record your final thoughts on this study. How would you explain the Sermon on the Mount to a friend? What do you most remember from the past eight weeks? What questions remain? What has been the most life-changing revelation?

# Notes

# Notes

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