

A grayscale photograph of a mountainous landscape. In the foreground, a dirt path leads from the bottom center towards the middle ground, flanked by grassy fields. The middle ground shows a valley with some vegetation and a dirt road winding through it. In the background, there are large, rugged mountains under a cloudy sky. The overall tone is somber and majestic.

PREACHING GUIDE

The Sermon on the Mount contains many of Jesus's most memorable sayings such as "blessed are the poor in spirit," "turn the other cheek," "don't judge lest you be judged," and "do to others as you would have them do to you." As a result, Matthew 5-7 has been one of the most studied, written about, and preached upon portion of the Bible throughout the church's history.

CHAPTER 1: Jesus's (Shocking) Vision for the Truly Blessed Life

Sermon Title: The Secret to True Happiness

Text: Matthew 5:1-16

Focus: Jesus opens His most famous sermon with nine declarations about where to find true happiness. We'll see that how He defines happiness is not what we expect. But like all philosophers and theologians, He's addressing the same question—*How do we find true happiness?*

Introduction:

What do all people at all times want? Is there anything that we can identify as universal and timeless that drives how all humans live? If so, what is it? Those questions are not new. They've been asked and answered for as long as people have been wrestling with what it means to be human. In the Greco-Roman world, before and during the time of Jesus, this question was discussed often by the great philosophers.

The answer they gave was consistent. Likewise, in the first eighteen hundred years of the church this question was asked by theologians and, maybe shockingly to us, they gave the same answer. All people want to be happy.

- I. Jesus the Sage (5:1-2)
- II. The Happy Life in Relationship to God (5:3-6)
- III. The Happy Life in Relationship to Others (5:7-12)
- IV. Life as Jesus's Priests in the World (5:13-16)

CHAPTER 2:

The Greater Righteousness of the Kingdom

Sermon Title: How to Live Righteously

Text: Matthew 5:17-48

Focus: The Sermon is a carefully crafted literary whole and 5:17-20 are not separate from the verses around them. 5:17-20 provides the thesis statement or guiding argument for the whole central section of the Sermon (5:17-7:12). In this portion of the study we will be looking at 5:17-48, which includes Jesus's big idea in 5:17-20 and the first set of six teachings to explain and apply this to our daily lives (5:21-48). Overall, in 5:17-48 Jesus is teaching us (1) how His entering into the world both confirms and transforms God's instructions to Israel; and (2) how to live righteously, that is, pleasing to God.

Introduction:

What teachings from the Old Testament apply to Christians today? The Hebrew Scriptures are full of instructions from God to His people and Jesus is clearly presented as the Jewish Messiah. It seems reasonable to argue that because God has not changed, these teachings from the Old Testament still apply to followers of Jesus. So are Christians forbidden to get tattoos (Leviticus 19:28) and eat pork (Deuteronomy 14:8)? Are we required to circumcise boys on the eighth day (Genesis 17:9-14) and avoid working on the Sabbath/Saturday so that we can worship God (Exodus 20:8-11)?

Building upon His introduction, Jesus presses into the main topic of His message—what it means to be righteous, that is, what it means to live according to what God says is right. The connection is clear—God cares about our flourishing and this can only be found when we live according to God's ways.

- I. Not Abolish but Fulfill (5:17-20)
- II. Murder and Anger (5:21-26)
- III. Adultery and Lust (5:27-30)
- IV. Adultery and Divorce (5:31-32)
- V. Oaths and Words (5:33-37)
- VI. Retaliation and Vengeance (5:38-42)
- VII. Enemies and Love (5:43-48)
- VIII. Summing It Up (5:17-20)

CHAPTER 3: Our Praise Problem

Sermon Title: Living as Whole People

Text: Matthew 6:1-21

Focus: Here in 6:1-21 Jesus addresses the disordered desire for the praise that comes from other people, applying it particularly to our religious lives. As with the rest of the Sermon, the point is the same—God wants us to be whole people, people whose outward lives match our inward lives, even as God himself is whole and consistent (5:48).

Introduction:

We humans have a praise problem. Our praise problem works in two directions, the vertical and the horizontal. Our vertical praise problem is that we often love and worship created things rather than the Creator (Romans 1:21-23). This dishonors our God and distorts our souls. The great theologian Augustine helpfully describes sin as our “disordered loves”¹—we love and worship in a disordered way, loving the wrong things or loving good things but in the wrong degree and order.

But we also have a horizontal praise problem—we all long for the praise and recognition of others. The issue here is complicated. On the one hand, there is nothing wrong with this in that we are designed as communal creatures who need each other’s love, affirmation, and encouragement. Any human who never receives this kind of good “praise” will not thrive physically, emotionally, or relationally. Additionally, God has made the world in such a way that we cannot help but praise and honor good and beautiful things in our fellow humans—a beautifully played violin sonata, a perfect goal in the corner of the net in a soccer game, an act of heroism or kindness. These things and these people rightly deserve honor, praise, and accolades.

But on the other hand, just like all our other loves, this good need for praise can get distorted. Our desire for the praise that comes from others can become disordered and we can become dependent on and crave this kind of attention, like an addict.

- I. The Opening Exhortation (6:1)
- II. The First Examples: Almsgiving (6:2-4)
- III. The Second Example: Prayer (6:5-8)
- IV. The Lord’s Prayer (6:9-15)
- V. The Third Example: Fasting (6:16-18)
- VI. The Concluding Exhortation (6:19-21)

1. Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods, with introduction by Thomas Merton (New York: Modern Library, 1950).

YOUR NOTES

CHAPTER 4: The Bridge to Wholeness

Sermon Title: Whole Living with Our Treasure

Text: Matthew 6:19-34

Focus: Disciples of Jesus must once again pursue wholeness. As with responding to God's instructions (5:21-48) and in the practice of our spirituality (6:1-21), true life in God's kingdom will only be found in the way of "greater righteousness." This greater righteousness is not merely external but pays attention to our hearts, our inner person. Whatever we give our heart to is what we give our allegiance to, and therefore, our future (6:21). There are few things in life that have more power to capture our allegiance than money and possessions. Thus, in this next section of applying the principle of 5:20, Jesus turns to the goods of the world and the unhappy result of what happens when we live bifurcated rather than wholehearted lives.

Introduction:

In the ancient world, many people described our ability to see as a function of light emitting from our eyes, like a modern-day flashlight. Thus, the eye is the lamp of the body in the sense that it shines forth what is inside our souls, our hearts, and our inner person. When our eye is "healthy" then this reveals whether our hearts are light/good or dark/evil. The key to understanding what Jesus is saying is paying attention to this Greek word, *haplous*. While "healthy" is not a bad translation, the more fundamental sense of this word is "singular" or "whole" (which is contrasted with "doubleness," as in James 1:8). If our eye is "whole" then this results in and shows that our inner person is light. Thus, we see again the repeated theme in the Sermon of the necessity of our wholeness, consistency, or integrity between the parts of who we are, both inside and out.

- I. God and Money (6:22-24)
- II. God, Money, and Anxiety (6:25-34)

CHAPTER 5: The Right Way to Judge

Sermon Title: Whole Living with Other People

Text: Matthew 7:1-12

Focus: Matthew 7:1-12 is the conclusion to the third application of Jesus's exhortation toward greater righteousness. The first application concerned relationships with each other as instructed by Torah (5:21-48). The second application focused on our acts of piety toward God (6:1-21). The third application of greater righteousness applies to our relationship to the goods and people of the world around us (6:19-7:12). In the preceding study (6:19-34) we saw how Jesus exhorts us to be wise in how we think about our relationship to money and possessions. Now Jesus invites us to the same kind of whole-person wisdom when we think about our relationships with other people (7:1-6). Jesus concludes this section by reminding us again of our heavenly Father's care and provision for us (7:7-11), even as he did in 6:25-34.

Introduction:

"Don't judge me!" has become a mantra for many people in our society. It is most often used when someone is aware that what they are doing is morally questionable, spoken with an air of defensiveness. Because Christian morals have been so pervasive in Western civilization and especially in America, many people who utter this phrase are reacting to real or perceived disagreements between their behavior and the teachings of Christianity.

Things get especially sticky when someone who says "Don't judge me" is aware of Jesus's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. They may not actually know much about the Sermon but Matthew 7:1 is one of those sayings that has woven its way into people's general knowledge. Thus, when someone senses that a Christian is disagreeing with their behavior, the response is often that this "judging" Christian is hypocritical and not following Jesus Himself. "Didn't Jesus Himself say, 'Don't judge'?" is often the vehement response. "How dare you question my choices and my morality while claiming to be a Christian?" Today we will consider Jesus's words on this topic. What does it mean to "judge"? What is a hypocrite and how do we avoid being one?

- I. Evaluating Rightly (7:1-2)
- II. Evaluating People Rightly (7:3-6)
- III. Evaluating God Rightly (7:7-11)
- IV. Living Wisely (7:12)

YOUR NOTES

CHAPTER 6: Two Ways of Living

Sermon Title: The Right Foundation

Text: Matthew 7:13–8:1

Focus: The conclusion to the Sermon consists of three subsections of teaching—7:13-14, 7:15-23, and 7:24-27. Each of these teachings use metaphors or parabolic images to invite us to feel the weight of Jesus's words. The broad and narrow paths, the true and false prophets, and the wise and foolish builders make clear that our response to Jesus cannot be neutral—it is a choice of one path or the other. Throughout this conclusion the same Sermonwide theme of wholeness can be found.

Introduction:

When the foundation of a house is weakened, damage and destruction follow. It is with this kind of vivid and memorable image (including this particular metaphor) that Jesus concludes His masterful message, the Sermon on the Mount.

The third and final image in Jesus's Sermon is appropriately climactic. Jesus describes two different people who build their houses in two different ways. One lays the foundation of his house on sand and the other on rock. The difference between these two people and their respective houses is described as wise versus foolish because sooner or later each house will undergo trial and stress. When it does, the wisdom or foolishness of the foundation work will be revealed. The rock-built house will be able to withstand the winds and water while the sandy foundation will give way, resulting in destruction of the whole house in dramatic fashion.

- I. The Broad and Narrow Paths (7:13-14)
- II. True and False Prophets (7:15-23)
- III. The Wise and Foolish Builders (7:24-27)
- IV. The Response of the Crowd (7:28–8:1)