

Foundational Interpretive Issues for the Gospels

I. Common Interpretive Errors

- A. Making the text mean something which it does not say, i.e., failing to honor the grammatical principle of interpretation.
 - 1. The meaning of the text is found in the words as used by the author in a precise arrangement.
 - 2. Our focus, then, must be on semantics (word meaning) and syntax (word arrangement).
- B. Making the text mean something which it never meant, i.e., failing to honor the historical principle of interpretation.
 - 1. This means that we seek to understand the words as they were used at the time of writing.
 - 2. This means we seek to understand the meaning of the text within the cultural framework it reflects and addresses. We must be careful to remain controlled, however, by the text (and its biblical context). The author's intent is communicated through the words of the text, and those words must hold authority over speculations about mental states and life situations.
- C. Making the text mean something which contradicts other Scripture, i.e., failing to honor the theological principle of interpretation.
 - 1. Our commitment to inspiration leads us inevitably to the processes of harmonization and correlation.
 - 2. We must find the delicate balance of letting each text speak clearly in its own voice while maintaining the unity of Scriptural truth.

II. The Nature of the Gospels

A. Theological History/Biography

1. They are not driven primarily by chronological factors.
2. They are not intended to give full coverage to the life of Christ.
3. They demonstrate purposeful selection and adaptation of material.
 - a. They should be read holistically.
 - b. They should be read harmonistically.

B. Two Contexts

1. The original setting and purpose of the Lord's teaching.
2. The literary setting and purpose of the Gospel writer.

The Interpretation and Expositional of Biblical Narratives

I. The Interpretation of the Biblical Narratives

A. General Guidelines

1. Biblical narratives are not merely stories about people who lived in biblical times. They are records of God's dealings with and through people. God is central to every narrative. The Gospels have a more sharply defined focus in that they are records of what God did in and through Jesus Christ.
2. Biblical narratives should not be treated as allegories or as if they contain hidden meanings. There is not one for one correspondence between each character, place, or action with some spiritual truth.
3. Narratives teach indirectly, rather than directly. Seldom is the point of the story stated in the form of a proposition, but must be discerned through the more means by which narratives communicate (discussed below). The story form often serves to engage the reader more fully into the events and experiences rather than simply explain them.
4. Biblical narratives must be handled carefully in terms of identifying normative belief and behavior. Behaviors may be recorded without approval or disapproval directly stated. Beliefs may be expressed without endorsement or denial. As a general rule, we should look for confirmation in those sections of Scripture which speak more directly.
5. Narratives, by nature, are selective and incomplete records. The writers provide the information deemed necessary to communicate the point of the narrative, not all the information that could be provided (cf. 1 Kings 11:41; John 21:25).

B. Gospel Guidelines

1. Each Gospel is a theological history-biography, and, therefore, is narrative in character. Put simplistically, each tells "the story of Jesus" with its own theological purpose. As we have already noted, they do not cover the full life of Christ or provide an exhaustive account of His ministry. The storyline of each Gospel is designed to communicate something about the person and work of Jesus Christ.
2. The Gospels advance the normal way in which a narrative advances—beginning, conflict, and resolution. Likewise, the authors use stylistic devices to develop their themes and accomplish their distinctive purposes.
3. Each Gospel should be read as a narrative on the macro level and not simply as a collection of narratives (the micro level). In fact, one runs the risk of missing the point on both levels (macro and micro) if each is not read with the other in view.

II. The Elements of Biblical Narrative

Since most of the literature on narratives relates to the OT narratives, the resources reflected in these notes will reflect this.

A. Scene

“Each scene represents something that took place at some particular time or place. In this regard, then, the scene acts much like the paragraph does in regular prose writing, usually supplying one main idea for each scene” (Kaiser, *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament*, p. 64).

B. Plot

“Basically, plot refers to action. It consists of a sequence of events that usually hinge on a conflict or crisis. The events in the story move through this conflict or crisis towards some kind of resolution” (Steven D. Matthewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*, p. 44).

1. Exposition

“The exposition provides the information that sets up the story. It introduces the characters, informing us of their names, traits, physical appearance, state in life, and relationships. It may also describe the geographical or historical setting.... Whatever the story writer includes, it will help the reader understand the action that follows” (Matthewson, p. 45).

2. Crisis

“From exposition, the plot moves into the crisis, variously described as the complication, the conflict, or the tension. Once the conflict appears, the tension rises as the story moves toward its resolution. For this reason, some scholars point to an inciting moment or occasioning incident when the problem appears for the first time. Subsequent development is described as complication or rising tension. Scholars describe the highest level of intensity in the conflict as the climax or peak moment” (Matthewson, p. 45).

3. Resolution

“Eventually, the story moves from crisis to resolution, and the plot descends rapidly from its climax to a solution of the original conflict” (Matthewson, p. 46).

“What matters most in the analysis of a narrative, we think, is to pinpoint the resolution of the plot. This moment, more than any other, is the one the reader is waiting for. It is also easier to uncover the resolution than the other moments. After this resolution, the dramatic tension drops and can even disappear completely” (Ska cited in Matthewson, p. 46).

4. Conclusion

“Finally, stories end in a conclusion or denouement. The latter term refers to the tying up of loose ends. The conclusion or denouement generally sums up the outcome of the story or the fate of the main characters in the wake of the resolution. Or the conclusion can offer a special message to the reader. Some narratives do not have a conclusion distinguishable from the resolution” (Matthewson, p. 47).

C. Characterization

We must “pay attention to the characters and how they develop. Because plot is primary, our analysis should attempt to specify the function of characters in relationship to the plot” (Matthewson, p. 57).

1. Identifying Characters

a. Major or minor—based on the size of the character’s role in the story.

b. Type

1) Protagonist—central characters who are indispensable to the plot

- 2) Antagonist—main adversaries or forces lined up against the central characters
- 3) Foil—characters who expand the story by serving as a contrast or parallel to the central character (“Any person or thing that, by strong contrast, underscores or enhances the distinctive characteristics of another” [*AHD*, p. 509]).

2. Gathering Information on Characters

“Once an analysis of the way a narrative is structured has been secured, it is important to begin discovering what a narrative expresses. The substance of what a narrative portrays can be found especially in its use of character. The real movement of a narrative comes from the characters and their actions and speeches. Therefore, it is just as impossible to portray a character apart from the events as it is to depict the events as separate from the character” (Kaiser, p. 68).

- a. A character’s own actions and his/her interaction with other characters.
- b. A character’s speeches.
- c. The speeches of other characters about a specific character.
- d. The narrator’s specific comments about a character (including names given).

D. Setting

“After scrutinizing the plot and characters of a story, an interpreter needs to consider two issues related to a story’s setting or environment. One issue concerns the specific place and time in which the story occurs. This is the story’s historical, cultural, and geographical setting. The other issue concerns the position of the story within the flow of stories that make up a book. Scholars often refer to this as the literary setting” (Matthewson, p. 67).

III. The Exegesis of Biblical Narrative

A. Study the Text

1. Establish the boundaries of your preaching text so that it is a definite unit.

“The task of the interpreter, teacher, or preacher, then, is to begin the study of each narrative by marking off the scenes in each story. This process is similar to the way one would break up a prose passage by marking off the individual paragraphs. Once these divisions are made, it is helpful to compose in one’s own words a brief synopsis of what is being said or happening in each scene, for this will function much like the topic or theme sentence in prose paragraphs” (Kaiser, p. 65).

2. Trace the plot

- Specify precisely the conflict and resolution.
- Note any clarifying statements in the exposition and conclusion.

3. Characters

- Identify the major and minor characters.
- Specify the role that the characters play in the plot.
- Detail what the narrative communicates about the characters via actions, descriptions, dialogue.

4. Setting

- Look for indications of historical, cultural, and geographical information that may be significant for the narrative.
- Determine how this narrative fits within its larger context.

B. Identifying the Theme

“A big idea distills the particulars into a summary by isolating what several ideas have in common” (Matthewson, p. 81).

1. Components

a. Subject: What Am I Talking About?

“To find the big idea of a thought unit (paragraph, story, etc.), determine the unit’s subject. The term subject does not refer to the grammatical subject of a sentence. Rather, it refers to the complete answer to the question, ‘What am I talking about?’ While a grammatical subject is often a single word, this is rarely the case with the subject of a big idea” (Matthewson, p. 81).

b. Complement: What Am I Saying About What I Am Talking About?

“A subject cannot stand alone. By itself it is incomplete, and therefore needs a complement. The complement ‘completes’ the subject by answering the question, ‘What am I saying about what I am talking about?’ A subject without a complement dangles as an open-ended phrase. Complements without subjects resemble automobile parts not attached to a car. An idea emerges only when the complement is joined to a definite subject” (Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, p. 40).

2. Process

“Obviously, determining the big idea of Old Testament narrative poses a steeper challenge than other literary genres. Stories work through indirection, conveying ideas in a more subtle way than poetry or prophecy” (Matthewson, pp. 84-85).

- a. Repeated words or concepts
- b. Pivotal statements in the dialogue
- c. Conflict-Resolution
- d. Find the underlying question
- e. Vision of God and Jesus Christ
- f. Depravity Factor

Identifying the Theme of Matthew's Gospel
Part One: The Process

Introduction:

1. Matthew is a theological narrative, so we should read it as a coherent narrative rather than as an anthology of stories and discourses.
2. Matthew has a purpose for writing which is communicated through his selection, arrangement, and use of the life events and teachings of the Lord.

I. Trace the Narrative Plot

- A. What is the point of conflict which drives the narrative?
- B. How do the exposition and conclusion prepare for and wrap up the narrative?
- C. What role do the main characters play in developing the plot?
 1. Who are the main characters in the narrative?
 2. What happens to the characters?
 3. How do the characters relate to one another?
 4. What are the pivotal moments, actions and/or statements?

II. Identify Key Words, Themes, and Texts

- A. What significant words and concepts are repeated throughout the narrative?
- B. Do any specific texts seem to stand out as crucial to the plot or as a statement of thematic significance?

III. Summarize and Synthesize the Parts

- A. What is the point and purpose of each distinct unit?
- B. How do the various units relate to one another?
- C. What do all of the units have in common? What is the unity that runs between them?

IV. Identify the Imperative Focus

- A. What is the text asking the reader to do?
- B. How does the rest of the text relate to this?

Identifying the Theme of Matthew's Gospel
Part Two: The Application

I. Trace the Narrative Plot

A. What is the point of conflict which drives the narrative?

1. The call for repentance (3:2; 4:17; 10:7) that is not heeded (11:16-27, esp. v. 20).
2. The presentation of the King and Kingdom (1:1, 17; 2:2; 4:23; 10:7; 11:1-6; 12:28; 21:28-32) that is rejected (9:33-34; 12:23-24; 21:42-46).

B. How do the exposition and conclusion prepare for and wrap up the narrative?

1. Exposition

- a. Presents Jesus as the Messiah (1:1-17) who was promised in the OT (1:22-23; 2:6; 2:15; 2:17-18; 2:23; 3:3; 3:17; 4:14-16).
- b. Presents an interesting contrast between the response of the Magi and the Jewish leaders and people (2:1-12).
- c. Anticipates conflict with the religious leaders (3:7-10).
- d. Initiates conflict between Jesus and the devil (possibly as parallel or analogous the testing of Israel in the wilderness, 4:1-11; cf. Deut 8:2-3).

2. Conclusion

- a. Demonstrates the continued rejection and opposition of the religious leaders, even to the point of another payoff and continued false accusations (28:11-15; cf. 26:14-16, 60).
- b. Confirms the post-resurrection glory and authority of Jesus Christ (28:16-18).
- c. Points toward the post-ascension ministry of the disciples that will run until the end of the age (28:19-20).

C. What role do the main characters play in developing the plot?

1. Who are the main characters in the narrative?

- a. Jesus (1:1-28:20!)
- b. The Pharisees (29x; cf. 52x in Mark-John), Scribes (21x; cf. 35x in Mark-John), and Sadducees (7x; cf. 2x in Mark-John)
- c. The Disciples
- d. John the Baptist (3:1-12; 3:13-17; 11:1-6; 11:7-15; 14:1-12; 17:9-13; cf. 16:14).

2. What happens to the characters?

- a. Jesus, following a miraculous birth, demonstrates Himself to be the Messiah through proclamation and power, is rejected by the leaders and nation and handed over to the Romans for crucifixion, but rises from the dead.
 - b. The religious leaders refuse to accept the message and authority of Jesus Christ (9:34; 12:24), culminating in unpardonable blasphemy (12:31-32) and a treacherous plot to kill Him (12:14; 22:45-46; 26:3-5, 14-16). Even after Jesus rises from the dead, they continue in their opposition (28:11-15).
 - c. The disciples are called to leave everything and follow Christ (4:18-22; 8:18-22; 9:9; 16:24-27). Jesus teaches them what discipleship means (11:28-30; 12:46-50; 13:11-12; 16:13-27; cf. 5:1-7:27), commissions them for ministry (10:1-15; 28:19-20), and warns them about the opposition that they will face (10:16-36; cf. 5:10-12).
 - d. John the Baptist is presented as the one who comes to prepare the way for the Lord (3:3), and is compared to Elijah without fulfilling the Elijah promise (11:14; 17:11-13).
3. How do the characters relate to one another?
- a. Jesus is continually challenged and opposed by the religious leaders (9:3-4, 11, 34; 12:2, 14, 24, 38; 15:1-2; 16:1; 19:3; 21:15-16, 23, 46; 22:15, 23, 34; 26:3-5).
 - b. Jesus regularly warns His disciples about them (10:24-25; 16:5-12; 23:1-12; cf. 5:20). The Lord is progressively more confrontational with them (9:12-13; 12:1-14; 13:30-32, 38-45; 15:1-9, 12-14; 16:1-4; 21:12-16; 21:23-46; 23:13-36).
 - c. Jesus selects, trains, and commissions His disciples (4:18-22; 9:9; 11:8-30; 16:13-27; 10:1-15; 28:19-20). The disciples accept Christ and His message (13:16; 14:33; [cf. 8:27]; 16:16; 28:17; cf. 11:25-27; 16:17), yet struggle with pride (18:1; 19:13; 20:20-28; 26:8-13), understanding (15:16; 16:9, 11, 22-23; cf. 15:33; 17:4, 10, 23; 19:25) and faith (8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20; 28:17; cf. 21:20-22).
 - d. Jesus honors and recognizes John the Baptist's role and ministry by submitting to John's baptism (3:13-15) and by declaring the true character of the Baptist and his ministry (11:7-15; cf. 17:9-13). The Lord also patiently, yet firmly, responds with reassurance to John's question about the Lord's identity (11:1-6).
4. What are the pivotal moments, actions and/or statements?
- a. Defining Interactions
 - 1) Jesus and the religious leaders: 9:33-34; 12:14, 23-24; 21:45-46; 23:1-39; 28:11-15.
 - 2) Jesus and His disciples: 8:27; 14:33; 13:10-17; 16:13-27; 28:16-20.
 - 3) Jesus and John the Baptist: 3:11-17; 11:13-15; 17:9-13.
 - b. Programmatic Statements

- 1) "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (3:2; 4:17; 10:7) vis-à-vis "because they did not repent" (11:20).
- 2) "blessed is he who does not take offense at Me" (11:6; cf. 5:29-30; 13:21, 57; 15:12; 17:27; 18:6-9; 22:42-44; 24:10; 26:31, 33).
- 3) "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters" (12:30).
- 4) "if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come" vis-à-vis "I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him" (11:14; 17:12).
- 5) "You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants" (11:25); "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (13:11); and, "flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (16:17).
- 6) "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it" (21:43).

II. Identify Key Words, Themes, and Texts

A. What significant words and concepts are repeated throughout the narrative?

1. Kingdom

- a. 55 times in 53 verses; cf. 70 times in 64 verses in the other Gospels
- b. “of heaven” 32 times in 31 verses; cf. not used at all elsewhere
- c. “of God” 4 times in 4 verses; cf. 48 times in 47 verses in the other Gospels
- d. “gospel of the kingdom” (4:23; 9:35; 24:14; cf. Luke 16:16).

2. Discipleship

- a. *mathateis* (71 times)
- b. *mathateoo* (13:52; 27:57; 28:19; cf. Acts 14:21)
- c. *manthano* (9:13; 11:29; 24:43; cf. John 6:45; Rom 16:17; Eph 4:20; Col 1:7 2 Tim 3:14; Titus 3:14).

3. Faith/Belief

- a. With some “causal” connection: 8:13; 9:2; 9:22; 9:28-29; 13:58; 21:20-22
- b. With “size” qualifier: 6:30; 8:10; 8:26; 14:31; 15:28; 16:8; 17:20 (interesting that the two uses of “great” modify Gentile faith).

4. Worship (2:2, 11; 14:33; 28:9, 17; cf. 4:9-10)

5. Compassion (9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; cf. 9:13; 12:7; 18:27)

6. Gentiles/nations

- a. Seemingly excluded from Christ’s mission (10:5-6; 15:21-28).
- b. Indicators of the Gentile mission, 1:5, 6; 2:1-12; 4:15, 24 [?]; 8:10-12; 8:28 ff.; 10:18; 12:18, 21; 26:13; 24:14; 28:19.

7. Authority (7:29; 8:9; 9:6, 8; 10:1; 21:23 ff; 28:18; cf. 11:27)

8. Fulfillment

- a. In relation to the Scriptures (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14, 35; 21:4; 26:54, 56; 27:9).

- b. Other “fulfill” statements: “all righteousness” (3:15); “the Law or the Prophets” (5:17); cf. the dragnet (13:48); “the measure of the guilt of your fathers” (23:32).
 - c. Cf. “written” or “referred to” (2:5; 3:3; 11:10; 26:24, 31)
 - 9. Repentance (3:2, 8, 11; 4:17; 10:7; 11:20)
 - 10. Obedience to the Father’s will (7:21; 12:50; 21:28-32; cf. 26:39-46)
 - 11. Divine revelation (11:25-27; 13:10-17; 15:13; 16:17; cf. 19:25-26; 22:14)
 - 12. Secrecy or concealment (8:4; 9:30; 12:16; 16:20; 17:9; cf. 16:21).
 - 13. Rejection of Israel/Announcement of Judgment (8:12; 10:15; 11:20-24; 12:41-42; 21:43-44; 23:33).
- B. Do any specific texts seem to stand out as crucial to the plot or as a statement of thematic significance?
- 1. The opening verse seems to set the book’s agenda regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ (1:1).
 - 2. The closing verses imply something about the book’s purpose for the Church (“make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you”).
 - 3. Matthew 12 seems to be the place where the rising conflict hits its peak and starts moving toward resolution. It is clear that the Pharisees come out fully in rejection of the Lord, with Matthew giving us the first indication of their desire to “destroy Him” (v. 14) and recording their blasphemous negative response to the people’s question about Jesus (vv. 23-24).
 - a. It begins with two disputes between Jesus and the Pharisees over the Sabbath that focus on the essential conflict between them—who they are and who He is! They do not have a heart that understands what God desires (v. 7). He is “greater than the temple” (v. 6) and “Lord of the Sabbath” (v. 8).
 - b. Matthew does two things between the conflicts over the Sabbath and the miracles that are very significant to the narrative. First, he lets us know that the Pharisees have reached the point where they are conspiring who to kill the Lord (v. 14). Second, he introduces a lengthy quote from Isaiah 42:1-4 as an explanation regarding the Lord’s warning for those who were healed “not to tell who He was” (v. 16). The significant point here seems to be the mention of the Gentiles twice: “He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles” (v. 18) and “in His name the Gentiles will hope” (v. 21).
 - c. The peak of their rejection is their claim that the miracles which the Lord performed were actually the work of Satan (vv. 22-24). The Lord not only

refutes this claim (vv. 25-29), but draws a clear line in the sand over this issue (vv. 30-32). The reason for this found in v. 28, "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." By refusing to accept the Lord's ministry, they were rejecting the kingdom. Interestingly, the Lord now uses John's description, calling them "vipers," to confront them about their evil hearts from which these evil words have proceeded (vv. 33-37).

- d. The depth and breadth of the rejection which Jesus faces seems to be implied in the Lord's response to the request for a sign (vv. 38-45). He does not limit His confrontational words to the Pharisees, even though it was their question, but broadens it to include "this evil generation" (v. 45; cf. "an evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign").
 - e. The final scene of this section underscores the central point that "whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother" (v. 50). This scene reflects two important discipleship themes: (1) Christ takes priority over family (cf. 10:37); and (2) doing the Father's will (cf. 7:21). N.B. Luke places this interaction after the parable of the sower and closes it with these words, "My mother and my brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:19-21).
4. The Pharisees' attribution of the miracles to the work of Satan and demons seem to be a real turning point of rejection (9:34; 12:24; cf. 10:25; 12:14). In fact, the whole section from 8:18 up to the Kingdom parables seems to show the conflict escalating until its crescendo with the blasphemy against the Spirit (12:31-32).
 5. The Lord's use of and explanation about the purpose of the parables indicates a change in His ministry (13:3, 10-17; cf. Mark 4:10-11).
 6. Following Peter's confession in Matthew 16, the Lord introduces three subjects for the first time: the church, v. 18; His death, v. 21; and His second coming, v. 27. There are allusions or hints regarding His death (9:15; 10:38; 12:4), but He had not clearly stated it (cf. "He began...He was stating the matter plainly" in Mark 8:31-32). "From that time" indicates a turning point in the Lord's ministry (cf. 4:17). Most place this in the last 12-18 months of His ministry.

III. Summarize and Synthesize the Parts

What is the point and purpose of each distinct unit?

A. Exposition, 1:1-4:16

The narrative opens by establishing that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah who was promised in the OT Scriptures.

B. Conflict, 4:17-12:50

The Lord begins His ministry with the announcement that the kingdom is at hand by proclaiming the righteousness that is the genuine fruit of repentance and faith and demonstrating the power of the kingdom through miracles. His call to repentance is not heeded by the leaders and most of the nation, and, instead, they deny His claim to be the Son of David.

C. Resolution, 13:1-28:10

Because of the hardness of their hearts, the Lord begins to teach in parables. While opposition to His ministry grows, He prepares His disciples for His death and the time before His second coming. Following His formal presentation as King to the nation through the Triumphal Entry, He is finally rejected and crucified for claiming to be “the Christ, the Son of God” (26:63). As He promised, He rises from the dead.

D. Conclusion, 28:11-20

The Jewish leaders devise a plan to deny that Jesus rose from the dead and circulate it among the people. The disciples are commissioned to make disciples of the nations.

IV. Identify the Imperative Focus

A. What is the text asking the reader to do?

1. Acknowledge the claim that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah promised in the OT (1:1; 16:16-18).
2. Follow Christ in obedient discipleship (11:28-30; 16:24-27; cf. 7:21-23; 10:34-39; 12:46-50).
3. Make disciples of the nations (28:19-20; cf. 10:16-23)

B. How does the rest of the text relate to this?

1. It supplies evidence that Jesus is the Christ who was promised.
2. It reveals the nature true discipleship through the Lord's example and instruction and by contrast with those who rejected Him.

Proposed Theme:

Jesus Christ, the Messiah promised in the OT, was rejected by Israel, so His kingdom has been postponed until after His disciples have fulfilled the Great Commission.

Exposition of Matthew's Gospel

Introduction:

1. There is much debate about how to outline Matthew's Gospel, and I've not been convinced by any of the more popular options. The narrative nature of a Gospel is part of the problem, and part of the solution, from my perspective. The outline for this class will follow the narrative development of the Gospel.
2. Given the time limitations of this course, we will not be able to cover the entire book paragraph by paragraph, so we will focus on the main theme(s) and theology for the whole book, then cover the first seven chapters more thoroughly.

I. Exposition, 1:1-4:16

The narrative opens by establishing that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah who was promised in the OT Scriptures.

A. The Genealogy and Miraculous Birth of the Messiah, 1:1-25

1. The Son of David and Abraham, 1:1-17
2. The Son of God, 1:18-25

B. The Fulfillment of Messianic Promises, 2:1-23

1. Jesus Fulfilled the Prophecy Regarding the Messiah's Birth in Bethlehem, 2:1-12
2. Jesus Fit the Pattern of God's Son being Called Out of Egypt, 2:13-21
3. Jesus Fit the Pattern of Scorn Shown to the Messiah, 2:22-23

C. The Preparation for the Messiah's Coming, 3:1-10

1. The Man

- a. His Title, 3:1
- b. His Location, 3:1
- c. His Lifestyle, 3:4
- 2. His Ministry
 - a. Preaching, 3:1
 - b. Preparation, 3:3
- 3. His Message
 - a. The Nearness of the Kingdom, 3:2
 - b. The Need for Genuine Repentance, 3:2, 6, 7-10
- D. The Presentation of the Messiah, 3:11-17
 - 1. Proclamation about the Messiah's Ministry, 3:11-12
 - 2. Demonstration of the Messiah's Humility, 3:13-15
 - 3. Announcement of the Messiah's Identity, 3:16-17

E. The Testing of the Messiah, 4:1-11

1. The Nature of the Test, 4:1-2

Notice the parallels between these two passages:

Deut 8:1-5	Matt 4:1-4
God has led you	led by the Spirit
into the wilderness	into the wilderness
Forty years	forty days and nights
testing you	to be tempted
let you be hungry	became hungry
his son	Son of God

It seems that you cannot escape the conclusion that Jesus was identifying with the people of Israel's time of testing in the wilderness, a test which they failed, but He will not. God's purpose in this test, for Israel and Jesus, was to test and to teach. The test was one of heart commitment; the teaching was of experiential obedience and fullness of ministry preparation (cf. Heb 5:8).

2. The Point of the Test, 4:3-10

a. The First Test, 4:3-4

b. The Second Test, 4:5-7

c. The Third Test, 4:8-10

3. The Outcome of the Test, 4:11

F. The Ministry of the Messiah, 4:12-16

II. Conflict, 4:17-12:50

The Lord begins His ministry with the announcement that the kingdom is at hand by proclaiming the righteousness that is the genuine fruit of repentance and faith and demonstrating the power of the kingdom through miracles. His call to repentance is not heeded by the leaders and most of the nation, but, instead, they deny His claim to be the Son of David.

- A. The Preaching of the Messiah, 4:17
- B. The Call of the Messiah's Disciples, 4:18-22
 - 1. Preparation for the Call, 4:18; cf. John 1:40-42; Luke 5:1-10
 - 2. Purpose of the Call, 4:19
 - 3. Pattern for the Call, 4:20, 22
- C. The Character of the Messiah's Ministry, 4:23-25
 - 1. Word, 4:23a
 - 2. Works, 4:23b-25
- D. The Sermon on the Mount, 5:1-7:29
 - 1. Introduction, 5:1-2
 - a. Single sermon?
 - b. To whom is it addressed?
 - c. Purpose?
 - 2. A Heart for God's Kingdom, 5:3-10
 - a. The Portrait of the Lord's Disciples
 - 1) They Recognize Their True Spiritual Condition, vv. 3-6
 - 2) They Reflect the Lord's Character, vv. 7-9

- 3) They Remain Faithful to the Lord, vv. 10
- b. The Promises to the Lord's Disciples
 - 1) They Receive God's Approval, "blessed"
 - 2) They Receive God's Grace, "shall be comforted...inherit...be satisfied..."
 - 3) They Enter God's Presence, "theirs is the kingdom...see God...sons of God"
- 3. Rejoicing in Persecution, 5:11-12
 - a. The Reality of Persecution, "insult...persecute...falsely say"
 - b. The Reason for Persecution, "of Me"
 - c. The Response to Persecution, "Rejoice and be glad"
 - 1) Our Responsibility, "Rejoice and be glad"
 - 2) The Reasons, "for your reward...for so they persecuted"
- 4. Discipleship on Display, 5:13-16
 - a. The Actions, vv. 13-16a
 - b. The Arena, "before men"
 - c. The Aim, "glorify your Father who is in heaven"
- 5. The Claims of the King, 5:17-48
 - a. The Lord and the Law, 5:17-20
 - 1) A Clarification about the Lord's Mission, vv. 17-18

- a) Jesus Did Not Come to Abolish the Law or the Prophets, v. 17a
- b) Jesus Came to Fulfill Them, v. 17b
- c) The OT Stands All is Accomplished, v. 18

2) The Obligation of the Disciples, vv. 19-20

The word “then” indicates that Jesus is drawing out the implication of the OT Scriptures authority for believers.

- a) Careful Obedience Affects Your Place in the Kingdom, “keeps and teaches”
 - (1) Disregard for God’s Will, “annuls one of the least... and teaches others”
 - (2) Commitment to God’s Will, “keeps and teaches”
- b) Genuine Righteousness Affects Your Entrance into the Kingdom, “righteousness surpasses”

What are the implications of this for the NT believer?

Does what Jesus teaches here mean that we, as NT believers, are still obligated to keep the commands of the Law?

- Clarification about Law vis-à-vis Mosaic Law: (a) there is a distinction to be made between the Pentateuch, OT, and the Mosaic Law (e.g., Gen 9:6); (b) to be out from under the Mosaic Law is not the same as being without law (cf. 1 Cor 9:21 “though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ”); (c) Jesus is placing Himself as the fulfillment of the Law and the One who takes the place of giving the new rule of life (cf. Matt 5:21 “But I say to you”).
- Everyone recognizes that at least certain portions of the Mosaic Law have been fulfilled to such an extent that they are no longer the rule of life for believers. For instance, Hebrews is clear that the sacrifices have been done away with because of the sacrifice of Christ. This reality is what has led to the approach which divides the Mosaic Law into three categories: moral, civil, and ceremonial. This distinction, though, is not valid: (a) there’s no exegetical basis for it in either Old or New Testaments; (b) there’s significant evidence that the Law was treated as a unitary whole; and (c) there’s no workable solution for deciding what the continuing moral law is (Decalogue includes Sabbath marked out as the 7th day, not just one in seven).
- Based on several NT passages, I believe it is best to see the purpose of Mosaic Law as having been fulfilled by Christ and therefore not directly applicable to NT believers. Galatians 3:23-25 teaches that the Law served a temporary function until Christ came. Romans 10:4

says that “Christ is the end of the law.” Ephesians 2:15 is clear that Jesus Christ abolished the divider between the Jews and Gentiles and identifies that as the Law.

- So, (1) Jesus is assuming the position of Teacher regarding what God expects for Kingdom citizens; (2) He is not re-establishing the Mosaic Law as the rule of life for believers in the church; (3) Since He is addressing Jews within a Kingdom context there is more continuity with the Mosaic Law than the NT epistles precisely because it is designed for the Kingdom offered to the Jews vs. for the global spread of the church (cf. 5:23-24); (4) This means we must be careful with the Sermon as we apply it, much like we need to be with the OT.

What “profitability” does the Law have for the NT believer?

- It is profitable, 2 Tim 3:16-17!
- It reveals God’s character to us (cf. Lev 11:45 “For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy”). Some aspects of this revelation are direct (e.g., murder as an attack on God’s image) and others are indirect (e.g., distinctions between clean and unclean that were intended to teach a principle of separation).
- It gives us examples and principles of moral conduct that help us apply NT commands. E.g., 1 Ths 4:3 says that God’s will is to abstain from fornication and the Law gives us loads of insight into what fits into that category of sin; the command to love your neighbor is given specificity when we see the parapet command in Deut 22:8 (“When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, so that you will not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone falls from it”).

It is crucial to remember that the Law could never give life and it could not supply the power which was necessary for keeping it. It couldn’t in the OT, and it can’t now. The only One who fulfilled all the Laws demands is Jesus Christ. Only through faith in Jesus Christ can the righteousness of Christ be credited to us (justification) and the Spirit of Christ come to dwell in us so that we can live in obedience to God (sanctification).

b. Anger and Reconciliation, 5:21-26

1) The Principle, vv. 21-22

2) Its Importance, vv. 23-26

a) Deal with Your Sin before You Come to Worship, vv. 23-24

b) Deal with Your Sin before You Get to the Judge, vv. 25-26

c. Adultery and Purity, 5:27-30

1) The Act of Adultery is Sin, v. 27

2) The Contemplation of Adultery is Sin, v. 28

- 3) The Battle with Sin Calls for Radical Amputation, vv. 29-30

- d. Marriage and Divorce, 5:31-32
 - 1) Biblical and Historical Contexts

 - 2) Principles
 - a) Divorce (and remarriage) without biblical grounds is adultery

 - b) Sexual sin allows divorce and remarriage without adultery (though it does not require it)

- e. Honesty and Oaths, 5:33-37
 - 1) The Problem: Using Lesser Oaths to Cloak Dishonesty (v. 33-36)
 - a) The Contemporary View, v. 33
 - b) The Lord's Response, vv. 34-36

 - 2) The Principles
 - a) There are no lesser oaths since God is sovereign over all things, vv. 34-36

 - b) Your Yes should simply be a Yes and need no props for credibility, v. 37

- f. Vengeance and Sacrifice, 5:38-42
 - 1) The OT Law was designed to guarantee equal justice, v. 38

 - 2) The righteousness which Christ demands rules out retaliation and requires a radical willingness to sacrifice self, vv. 39-42
 - a) Christ's followers should not be controlled by a payback principle, 39a

 - b) Christ's followers should willingly surrender their personal rights, vv. 39b-42

- g. Enemies and Sonship, 5:43-48
 - 1) The Contemporary Mindset, v. 43
 - 2) The Master's Will: Jesus Christ calls His disciples to imitate God by being gracious to all, vv. 44-47
 - a) Its Nature, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"
 - b) Its Motivation, "so that you may be sons of your Father"
 - 3) The Summary Command, v. 48
- 6. Sincere Righteousness, 6:1-18
 - a. Introduction, 6:1
 - b. Application, 6:2-18
 - 1) Giving to the poor, 6:2-4
 - a) The Responsibility, "when you give to the poor"
 - b) The Restriction, "do not sound a trumpet...as the hypocrites do"
 - c) The Reason, "reward in full...your Father who sees in secret...will reward you"
 - 2) Prayer, 6:5-15

- a) The Character of Prayer, 6:5-8
 - (1) Sincere Prayer Seeks to Draw Near to God, Not Draw Attention to Self, vv. 5-6
 - (a) Responsibility, “When you pray...”
 - (b) Restriction, “may be seen by men”
 - (c) Reasons, “reward in full...will reward you”
 - (2) Sincere Prayer is Meaningful, Not Manipulative, vv. 7-8
- b) The Model for Prayer, 6:9-13
 - (1) The Character of the Disciples’ Prayer
 - (a) It is for Disciples, “Our Father”
 - (b) It is for Disciples as a Group, “Our...us...we”
 - (c) It is for a Pattern, not for Repetition, “Pray...in this way” (not “Pray this”)
 - (2) The Content of the Disciples’ Prayer
 - (a) Talk to the Father about the Father, vv. 9-10
 - That His Name Will Be Honored, “hallowed be Your name”
 - That His Kingdom Will Come
 - That His Will Be Done
 - (b) Talk to the Father about His Children, vv. 11-13

- About Our Daily Needs, v. 11
- About Our Spiritual Needs, vv. 12-13

c) The Condition for Prayer, 6:14-15

3) Fasting, 6:16-18

a) Responsibility, “Whenever you fast...”

b) Restrictions, “do not put on a gloomy face”

c) Reasons, “they have their reward...will reward you”

7. Undistracted Devotion to the Lord, 6:19-34

a. Principle, 6:19-24

1) Two Treasures, 6:19-21

It seems clear from the description in these verses that the Lord is talking about the use of our material goods. Though the text does not restrict it to this, this is the clear emphasis of the passage: (1) material things; (2) wealth/mammon; and (3) food, clothing, etc.

a) Their Nature, vv. 19-20

(1) Earthly and Temporal, v. 19

(2) Heavenly and Eternal, v. 20

b) Their Importance, v. 21

2) Two Visions, 6:22-23

- a) The Principle, v. 22a
 - b) The Implications, vv. 22b-23a
 - c) The Warning, v. 23b
- 3) Two Masters, 6:24
 - a) The Principle, v. 24a
 - b) The Choice, v. 24b
- b. Application, 6:25-34
 - 1) The Focus of Worry, v. 25
 - 2) The Futility of Worry, vv. 26-29
 - 3) The Flaws in Worry, vv. 30-34
- 8. Wrong and Right Judgment, 7:1-6
 - a. Judgmentalism, 7:1-5
 - 1) The Character of Judgmentalism, v. 1a
 - 2) The Consequences of Judgmentalism, vv. 1b-4
 - a) Judgmentalism Invites Judgment, vv. 1-2
 - (1) Those who are judgmental will be judged by God, v. 1b
 - (2) Those who are judgmental are guilty before God, v. 2

- b) Judgmentalism Reveals Hypocrisy, vv. 3-5
 - (1) It's hypocrisy because of its phony concern about sin, v. 3
 - (2) It's hypocrisy because of its phony interest in others, v. 4
 - 3) The Cure for Judgmentalism, v. 5
 - a) An Important Clarification: It is not wrong to see faults and seek to correct them!
 - b) An Essential Condition: Deal with your own sin first, then you can help others!
- b. Discernment, 7:6
 - 1) The Parts of the Proverb
 - a) Something sacred and valuable—"what is holy" and "pearls" serve to highlight things that are sacred and valuable.
 - b) Something profane and unclean
 - c) Something is trampled and torn—this last part of the verse probably completes a chiasmus which means the trampling is done by the swine and the tearing is done by the dogs.
 - 2) The Point of the Proverb
 - a) The point in this proverb is built off of the contrast between the respective parts. That contrast focuses on sacred and valuable things being given to those which have no appreciation for them. Dogs cannot tell the difference between garbage and holy things. Pigs have no appreciation for pearls over peas.
 - b) If *what is holy* and *pearls* are representative of God's truth, then the point has something to do with not giving God's truth to those who have no appreciation for it.
 - c) God's messengers must evaluate their hearers so that they do not dishonor God's Word and endanger themselves.
 - (1) This is what the Lord Himself did, Matt 11:20-27; 12:38-45; 15:14;
 - (2) This is what He taught His disciples to do, Matt 10:14-15
 - (3) This is how Paul conducted His missionary ministry, Acts 13:46-47; 18:5-6; 28:25-28.
 - (4) This is what Paul told Titus to do in Crete, Titus 3:10-11.

9. Asking and Trusting, 7:7-11

a. The Manner of Prayer, v. 7

1) Prayer as Petition, “ask...seek...knock”

2) Prayer as Pattern, “*asking...seeking...knocking*”

b. The Motivations for Prayer, vv. 8-11

1) The Nature of Prayer, v. 8

2) The Nature of God, vv. 9-11

10. Summary of True Righteousness, 7:12

a. Its Comprehensiveness, “In everything...for this is the Law and the Prophets”

b. Its Character

11. The Narrow Gate, 7:13-14

a. The Command: Commit to Discipleship! “Enter through the narrow gate”

b. The Reasons

1) Two Gates and Two Ways, “gate is wide... way is broad...gate is small...way is narrow”

a) The Wide Gate and Broad Way—emphasis is on the visibility, accessibility, and ease of this gate and path. A wide gate is easily seen and passed through; a wide path is easily followed.

b) The Small Gate and Narrow Way—emphasis is on the need to find, go through the gate, and continue on the path.

2) Two Final Destinations, “destruction...life”

3) Two Crowds, “many...few”

12. Spotting False Prophets, 7:15-23

a. The Theme: How to Spot a False Prophet

- 1) Proof: “Beware” (v. 15); “you will know” (v. 16a, 20); good vs. bad fruit imagery (vv. 16-19)
- 2) This instruction is needed because of the false claims and impressions given by false prophets (vv. 15b, 21 ff).
- 3) The connection between the idea of false prophets (v. 15) and the claim of those described in vv. 21-22 show that this is one unit.
- 4) The problem of *false prophets* is addressed in both testaments. OT: Deut 13:1-5; Jer 23:9-32. NT: 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 4:1-3; Rev 2:20. The Lord speaks directly about it Matthew 24:11, 24 also. Without using the title *false prophet* the same problem is also dealt with in 1 Tim 4:1-5; 2 Tim 4:2-4; and Acts 20:29-30 even uses the *wolves* imagery.
- 5) Putting it simply, these are *false* prophets because they are not God’s prophets! Whether motivated by selfish desires like greed, intellectual pride, or the desire for popularity (Rom 16:18; 1 Tim 6:20-21; 2 Tim 4:2-4), or by Satanic deception (1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Cor 11:13-15), the fact is that they are dangerous to God’s people and work.

b. The Test—Fruit Inspection, “you will know them by their fruits”

- 1) The Kind of Fruit Reveals the Kind of Tree, v. 16
- 2) The Quality of the Fruit Reveals the Character of the Tree, vv. 17-18
 - a) A Simple Reality: Good trees bear good fruit; bad trees bear bad fruit, v. 17
 - b) A Practical/Moral Necessity, v. 18
- 3) The Quality of the Fruit Confirms the Destiny of the Tree, v. 19

What is good fruit? (something observable [vs. claim] which reflects the root)

1. It can’t be ministerial success, cf. v. 22.
 - a. The works that are performed by these false prophets appear to be ministerial success—prophesying, casting out demons, performing miracles. This probably constitutes the “sheep’s clothing” of v. 15.
 - b. All of these things may find their source in counterfeit activity by demons or humans (cf. Acts 19:13-16; Rev 13:13-14).
 - c. The devil counterfeits in order to deceive and lead people away from God and His truth. False prophets counterfeit and deceive in order to serve themselves by

13. Two Foundations, 7:24-27

a. The Parable

- 1) This parable reveals the difference between a baseless profession and one that will pass the test. In this regard, it is closely connected to what precedes it (cf. "Therefore" in v. 24).
- 2) The details of the parable:
 - a) The house is a person's profession or claim of salvation, cf. "Many will say to Me on that day" (v. 22).
 - b) The foundation is what that profession or claim is based on. Since the foundation is crucial to the stability of the house, the Lord focuses their attention on two different kinds of foundations.
 - c) The house founded "on the rock" is a profession that is based on hearing and acting on Christ's words, cf. "everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them" (v. 24).
 - d) The house founded "on the sand" is a profession that is based on only hearing Christ's words, not acting on them, cf. "everyone who hears these words of Mine

and does not act on them” (v. 26).

- e) Being wise or foolish here is determined by whether one has a profession with a solid foundation or a baseless one.

b. The Point:

- 1) Genuine repentance and faith act on Christ’s words not merely agree with or admire them.
- 2) The only profession that passes the test is one that is joined to the obedience of faith.

14. Conclusion, 7:28-29

- a. The Character of His Authority, “teaching them as one having authority”
- b. The Contrast to His Authority, “not as their scribes”

E. The Authority of the Messiah, 8:1-34

- 1. Healings, 8:1-17
- 2. Disciples, 8:18-22
- 3. Nature, 8:23-27
- 4. Demons, 8:28-34

F. The Conflicts of the Messiah, 9:1-12:50

- 1. A Series of Conflicts, 9:1-34
 - a. Over the Healing of the Paralytic, 9:1-8
 - b. Over Eating with Tax Collectors and Sinners, 9:9-13
 - c. Over Fasting, 9:14-17
 - d. Over the Power of His Ministry, 9:18-34
- 2. The Cost of Following Christ, 10:1-42
- 3. With and About John the Baptist, 11:1-19
- 4. Confrontation and Invitation, 11:20-30
- 5. The Decisive Confrontation with the Pharisees, 12:1-50

- a. The Lord of the Sabbath, 12:1-21
- b. Blasphemy of the Spirit, 12:22-37
- c. Evil Pursuit of Signs, 12:38-45
- d. True Spiritual Relationships, 12:46-50

III. Resolution, 13:1-28:10

Because of the hardness of their hearts, the Lord begins to teach in parables. While opposition to His ministry grows, He prepares His disciples for His death and the time before His second coming. Following His formal presentation as King to the nation through the Triumphal Entry, He is finally rejected and crucified for claiming to be “the Christ, the Son of God” (26:63). As He promised, He rises from the dead.

IV. Conclusion, 28:11-20

The Jewish leaders devise a plan to deny that Jesus rose from the dead and circulate it among the people. The disciples are commissioned to make disciples of the nations.

Excursus 1: The Kingdom in Matthew

1. The Kingdom is “at hand” (3:2; 4:17; 10:7) and “has come upon them” (12:28).
2. The Kingdom is future:
 - “kingdom come” (6:10)
 - “will enter the kingdom of heaven” (7:21)
 - “many will come...in the kingdom” (8:11-12)
 - “coming in His kingdom” (16:28)
 - “will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (18:3)
 - “in Your kingdom” (20:21)
 - “will get into the kingdom of God before you” (21:31)
 - “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people” (21:43)
 - “inherit the kingdom prepared for you” (25:34)
 - “until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom” (26:29).
3. The Kingdom is a place:
 - “will enter...depart from Me” (7:21-23)
 - “enter into” vs. “throw out...into outer darkness” (25:21, 23, 30)
 - “come from the east and west, and recline...cast out into outer darkness” (8:11-12)
 - “will gather out of His kingdom” (13:41)
 - “in Your kingdom...may sit one on Your right and one on Your left” (20:21)
 - “kingdom come” (6:10, cf. “on earth...heaven”)

What about the Lord’s statement that “the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21 KJV and NIV)?

- (1) The word translated “within” (*entos*) can also mean “in the midst of” or “among” (BDAG, 341) and this is how it is translated by NASB, ESV, and HCSB.
- (2) The question put to the Lord is not “where” is the kingdom, but “when the kingdom of God was coming.”
- (3) It seems very improbable, almost to the point of impossible, that the Lord would tell a group of Pharisees that the “kingdom of God is within you” given His consistent rebuke and rejection of them.

4. The Kingdom is tied to Israel and OT promises:
 - “the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah” (1:1; cf. 1:17)
 - “born King of the Jews” (2:2, 4-6; 21:5; 27:11; 27:29, 37, 42; cf. 5:35)
 - “go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel...preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (10:5-7)
 - “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (15:24)
 - “Son of David” (1:1, 20; 12:23; 21:9, 15; cf. Luke 1:33; 10 of 16 times in the Gospels)
 - The kingdom is suddenly proclaimed without introduction or definition and that the basis for this is continually drawn from the OT promises (cf. Mark 15:43).
5. The kingdom of heaven is not to be distinguished from the kingdom of God:
 - “kingdom of heaven” is used only by Matthew (32 times), but he does use “kingdom of God” four times (12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43). Some older dispensationalists made a distinction between these two (e.g., Scofield).
 - “enter the kingdom of heaven” is used parallel to “enter the kingdom of God” (19:23-24)

- There are an abundance of parallels where Matthew's "kingdom of heaven" is presented as "kingdom of God" by either Mark or Luke (cf. 4:17 with Mark 1:15; 11:11 with Luke 7:28; 13:11 with Mark 4:11 and Luke 8:10; 13:31 with Mark 4:30; 19:14 with Mark 10:14 and Luke 18:16)
 - The designation "kingdom of heaven" seems best explained as rooted in Daniel's prophecies about the future. The interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's vision regarding the image ends with the announcement that "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed" (Dan 2:44). Daniel 7 contains a vision of "One like a Son of Man" whose "kingdom is one which will not be destroyed" (vv. 13-14).
6. The kingdom was genuinely offered, was rejected by the leaders and nation, and was taken away from the nation of that day:
- Announcement and offer, 3:2; 4:17, 23; 9:35; 10:7; cf. 12:28.
 - Rejection, 9:32-34; 12:22-24; 17:12; cf. 10:14-15; 11:20-24; 21:28-32, 33-41; 21:42
 - Taken away, 21:43; cf. 26:29, 64
7. Entrance into the kingdom was promised only to those who met the spiritual conditions of the kingdom:
- "repent" (3:2; 4:17; 10:7; cf. 3:8, 10; 21:43)
 - "faith" (8:10-12; cf. 21:31-32)
 - "poor in spirit" (5:3)
 - "persecuted for the sake of righteousness" (5:10)
 - "righteousness [that] surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees" (5:20)
 - "he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven" (7:21; cf. 12:50; 21:28-32)
 - "unless you are converted and become like children" (18:3; cf. 19:14)
 - "Then who can be saved?... 'With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible'" (19:25-26; cf. 11:25-27; 13:11-17; 15:13; 16:17; 22:14)

Excursus 2: The Sermon on the Mount

Introduction:

- The Sermon on the Mount is at once the most famous of our Lord's teachings and most debated. Historically, views on the Sermon have varied widely:
- For dispensationalists, the proper interpretation of the Sermon has been a focal point of discussion because it touches on important distinctives like the nature of the kingdom, the relationship between Law and grace, the on-going place of the Law in a believer's life, the distinction between Israel and the Church.
- Regardless of one's overall hermeneutical commitments, the Sermon presents one with interpretive challenges:
- The expositor also must wrestle with the purpose and function of the Sermon within Matthew's gospel, specifically how it relates to its theme and to Matthew's readers.

I. Kingdom Only View

- A. Concept
- B. Arguments
- C. Problems

II. Kingdom Anticipation View

- A. Concept
- B. Arguments
- C. Problems

III. Believer's Ethic View

- A. Concept
- B. Arguments
- C. Problems

Excursus 3: A Biblical Overview of Fasting

I. The Meaning of Fasting

A. The Definition

1. "The act of total or partial abstinence from food for a limited period of time, usually undertaken for moral or religious purposes" (*EDT*, p. 406).
2. "A biblical definition of fasting is a Christian's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes" (Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, p. 152)

In its very basic definition *to fast* means to abstain from food. Both the Hebrew and Greek (νηστευω) words reflect this meaning. A more formal general definition of fasting would be "Deliberate and sustained abstinence from all food for a specific period of time" (*Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, p. 284). A more precise definition of the spiritual discipline of fasting, which takes into account a wider range of factors, is found in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (p. 147), "Abstinence, for religious reasons, from nourishment in varying degrees, especially at sacred seasons, by religious groups (church, nation, order, congregation) and individuals." About this spiritual aspect of fasting, Richard Foster adds, "Throughout Scripture fasting refers to abstaining from food for spiritual purposes . . . Biblical fasting always focuses on spiritual purposes" (*Celebration of Discipline*, pp. 48-49).

There is an interesting Hebrew phrase used in connection with fasting, and even taken by some as a means of expressing the idea, which gives us insight into the meaning of fasting. The phrase *you shall humble your souls* used in Lev 16:29 is taken to mean fasting because of its association with it in Isa 58:3 and Ps 35:13. The fast is intended to be an affliction of the inner person (TWOT, 2:758). There is a strong focus of self-denial and self-renunciation in the discipline of fasting. As Walter Kaiser notes, "they voluntarily afflicted their bodies to do without food in order to physically join in the grief of their souls" (*Quest for Renewal*, p. 59).

This aspect of fasting is latently identified by our Lord in His words to those who questioned Him about His disciples' lack of participation in fasting. His answer to His detractors indicates that He associated fasting with mourning. He says to them "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot *mourn* as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will *fast*" (Mt 9:15 NASB). There is at least as much as the convincing association of fasting with strong emotional feeling like that described in the OT practice. More will be seen about this when we discuss the motivations for fasting which are presented in Scripture.

B. The Details

1. The Length of Fasts

Scripture presents a varied picture of the lengths of fasts. Fasts appear to run normally from morning to evening (Judg 20:26; 2 Sam 1:12) but could sometimes extend to longer periods (cf Esther 4:16; 1 Sam 31:13). The longest recorded fasts were those of Moses (Ex 34:28), Elijah (1 Kgs 19:8), and the Lord (Mt 4:2). These appear to be abnormal and sustained in a supernatural way.

2. The Type of Fast

- a. The *normal* fast is one which abstains from all food (solid and liquid) for a prescribed period of time but permits the drinking of liquid.
- b. The *partial* fast limits the diet of particular foods, but some is allowed, cf. Dan 10:3.
- c. The *absolute* fast requires abstinence from food and liquids in all forms, cf. Exo 34:28; Est 4:16.

Each type is observed in Scripture. The most common is obviously the *normal* fast. A *partial* fast was observed by Daniel (Dan 10:3), and, as difficult as it may seem, Moses kept an *absolute* fast for forty days and nights (Ex 34:28). The extreme nature and length of the fast of Moses seemed to combine to point

toward a Divine enablement for its accomplishment. A shorter *absolute* fast was called for by Esther (Est 4:16). It seems that the point is not in the particular type of fast as much as in the objective of the fasting, i.e. the self-restriction of our eating habits and patterns.

C. The Defense

That fasting was common in the Old Testament is obvious from the frequent mention of its practice. However, there was only one day of legislated fasting in the Israelite economy and that was the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29 ff.). There was no command for regular fasting to be observed by the OT saints. Outside of the national fast on the Day of Atonement, it appears to be a matter of voluntary fasting. We can observe that by the period of the exile there were four fasts that were being observed annually (Zech 8:19), but these are not required by Yahweh (in fact He rejects the way in which they were being observed--see below).

For the New Testament believer the fast associated with the Day of Atonement has obviously been eliminated, but what about fasting at other times or at all? There is some debate about the matter of fasting and whether it is a required or commanded practice for believers of the present age.

1. The Lord began His ministry with a prolonged fast (Mt 4:2).
2. Christ's most substantial teaching on fasting (Mt 6:16-18) is joined in context with the issues of prayer (6:6-15) and giving (6:1-5). The language gives the impression that believers will fast (*whenever you fast*).
3. When the Lord is asked why He and His disciples do not fast like the Pharisees and John's disciples, He answers by asserting that it would not be appropriate while He, the bridegroom, was still with them, but the "days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast" (Mt 9:15). The inference drawn from this text is that fasting is appropriate for the interim between the advents of our Lord.
4. The argument that the NT epistles do not mention the matter of fasting seems to misread the two autobiographical texts by Paul in 2 Corinthians (6:5; 11:27).

II. The Motive for Fasting

Given the meaning of fasting we have already presented earlier, one would expect fasting to be motivated by circumstances that take firm hold on the one who sets him/herself to this discipline. The record of fasting in Scripture confirms this impression. Here are some of the circumstances which prompt fasting in the OT Scripture (found in the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, pp. 502ff): (1) Day of Atonement; (2) Times of Distress (wars, sickness, mourning, repentance, impending danger; (3) Prep for revelation; (4) worship and service; (5) Commencement of ministry; and (6) consecrating people to the Lord's care.

The common denominator among all of them appears to be the seriousness of the occasion or circumstance. Each response of fasting was in connection with some event or occasion which called for the highest level of fervency by the one who gives him/herself to the task of fasting. It appears that fasting was the concrete expression of the response of the heart or spirit. That response of the inner person may be grief over the death of someone (2 Sam 1:12), repentance for sin (Neh 9:1; Jon 3:5-7), earnest desire for Divine help (2 Sam 12:16-23), or desire for and receptivity to Divine disclosure (Acts 9:9; Dan 9:3).

In all except the matter of grief over someone's death the idea of prayer is inextricably linked to fasting, and it may be implied in that case. The focus of the discipline appears to be the commitment of the total self in expressing the response or desire of the inner person. It is the clear demonstration of the inner heart attitude and commitment.

- A. To Humble Ourselves before the Lord, Ps 35:13; Ezra 8:21; Isa 58:5
- B. To Help Us Pray to the Lord, Dan 9:3; Isa 58:4

III. The Misuse of Fasting

There appear to be two main misuses of the discipline of fasting. The first is criticized in the OT prophets and the second was denounced by the Lord in the Sermon on the Mount.

A. Fasting as Empty Ritual, Isa 58:3 ff.

The pattern of Israel was to turn the fast into a ritual which could be used as leverage to move God to do their bidding (cf Isa 58:3 ff.). The LORD rejected this manipulative approach to fasting and demanded that only fasting which accompanied the proper self-renunciation and submission that issues forth in obedience (vv. 6-7). The fast cannot be used as an empty ritual to guarantee a hearing with God. Jeremiah records of the Lord as He refuses to hear them in spite of their fasting (14:12).

The only acceptable fast was one that was based in a desire to follow the Lord and seek righteousness. A self-centered fast earned no standing before God. Unfortunately the Israel often pursued a path of self-centered fasting which led the Lord to challenge their practice (Zech 7:5). He wonders, rhetorically, for whom they fasted over the period of the seventy years ("was it actually for Me that you fasted" NASB). Certainly this type of ritualistic fast was not the God-centered fast that receives the approval of our God.

B. Fasting as Public Display, Matt 6:16-18

A second misuse of fasting was exemplified by the Pharisees and challenged by the Savior in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6:16-18). Their abuse of the discipline was in its ostentatious display of their piety. Their practice was to "neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men" (v 16 NASB). In contrast to this pattern, the Lord charges the disciples to fast discreetly and take active measures (v 17) so that they will not be observed by men (v 18). The only One who should know, and is the only One that matters, is the Heavenly Father (v 18).

Conclusions about Fasting:

Given all of the biblical data and the absence of any regulatory commands about the frequency of fasting, how should the believer incorporate fasting into his "exercise" toward godliness?

1. It should be noted that fasting is not an essential exercise of spiritual discipline, i.e. we are not exhorted in to fast in the same way we are to pray and to study the Word. That is not to minimize its significance (we have already argued that it should be practiced), but to recognize that it is not presented in Scripture as an on-going discipline of spiritual growth or a means by which we grow spiritually. These may occur along with fasting, but we are not told to fast in order to grow (as we are told to study the Word in order to grow).
2. It should be noted that fasting is not an independent exercise of spiritual discipline, i.e., fasting is a discipline which most often should be participated in conjunction with prayer and the study of the Word. It expresses an earnestness of our hearts toward some particular need or circumstance for which we seek Divine help or answer. Fasting enables us to focus our attention on God and become aware of His presence, and hence we can worship Him more effectively.
3. It should be noted that fasting, by inference, can be a valuable discipline tool to help us: (a) reinforce our dependence upon God and His Word rather than material things (Mt 4:4); (b) break the external control of lives by temporal matters (1 Cor 6:12); (c) bring our bodies into subjection (1 Cor 9:27); and, (d) demonstrate that our appetites are not our God (Rom 16:18; Phil 3:19).

Excursus 4: The Interpretation and Exposition of Parables

Introduction:

1. Contrary to the popular and simplistic view of the parables, they have been the subject of enormous scholarly debate and are notoriously difficult to interpret.
2. Historically, the parables have often suffered violence at the hands of interpreters, most often those who approached them with a spiritualizing or allegorizing method.

The best-known example of such theological allegorization is Augustine's interpretation of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), where virtually every item is given a theological significance: (1) the man is Adam; (2) Jerusalem is the heavenly city; (3) Jericho is the moon, which stands for our mortality; (4) the robbers are the devil and his angels, who strip the man of his immortality and beat him by persuading him to sin; (5) the priest and Levite are the priesthood and ministry of the Old Testament; (6) the good Samaritan is Christ; (7) the binding of the wounds is the restraint of sin; (8) the oil and wine are the comfort of hope and the encouragement to work; (9) the donkey is the incarnation; (10) the inn is the church; (11) the next day is after the resurrection of Christ; (12) the innkeeper is the apostle Paul; and (13) the two denarii are the two commandments of love, or the promise of this life and that which is to come (Klyne R. Snodgrass, "From Allegorizing to Allegorizing" in *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables*, p. 4).

3. Although modern interpreters seldom go to these lengths in "finding" meaning in the parables, the proper approach to parables within an expositional commitment to preaching is a matter that requires careful thought.

I. The Definition of a Parable

A. The Basic Concept: Comparison

"A parable is a form of figurative language involving comparisons. But rather than using a single word or phrase to make the comparison or analogy, as in a simile, metaphor, or hypocatastasis [a comparison by implication], a parable is an extended analogy in story form" (Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, p. 194).

"The word *parable* comes from the Greek *para* ("beside or alongside") and *ballein* ("to throw"). Thus the story is thrown alongside the truth to illustrate the truth. Hearers and readers, by sensing the comparison or analogy between the story and their own situation, are prodded to think. In interpreting parables we need to ask, What is the point of the story? What spiritual truth is being illustrated? What analogy is being made?" (Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, p. 194).

"The term 'parable' in the Bible possesses an extremely broad semantic range. It can refer to the three-word proverb 'Physician, heal yourself' (Luke 4:23) or to a lengthy story parable such as the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). Lying at the core of the Old Testament *mashal* and the New Testament *parabole* is a comparison of two unlike things. The comparison can be brief or extended, implicit (as in a metaphor, riddle, story, or example parable) or explicit (as in a simile, similitude, or allegory)" (Robert Stein, "The Genre of Parables" in *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables*, p. 47).

B. The Types of Parables

1. Maxims or Proverbs, Luke 4:23; 6:39

"Whereas a parable can be a proverb, this does not mean that every proverb can be classified as a parable. Only those proverbs in which a comparison of unlike things is found should be included in the genre 'parable'" (Stein, "The Genre of Parables", p. 42).

2. Riddles, Mark 7:15-17
3. Similitudes (extended similes), Matthew 13:24, 31
4. Stories, Luke 18:1-8; cf. Matt 20:1-16; 25:1-13

“Under this classification we refer to parables in the narrow sense—that is, to extended, fictional comparisons in story form that refer generally to a unique event” (Stein, “The Genre of Parables,” p. 44).

5. Examples, Luke 12:16-21; 14:7-11; cf. Matt 18:23-35

“The distinction between story parables and example parables is somewhat arbitrary. Whereas a story parable functions as ‘an earthly story bearing a heavenly meaning,’ an example parable functions as an example that says either ‘Go and do likewise’ (Luke 10:37) or ‘Go and do not do likewise.’ As a result, the meaning of the picture part of an example parable—that is, the analogy proper—lies much nearer to the surface and corresponds more closely to the reality that the analogy is teaching” (Stein, “The Genre of Parables,” p. 45).

6. Allegories, Matt 13:24-30; 21:33-41; 22:1-10

“When we speak of the genre ‘parable’ as including allegory, we are referring to allegory as a literary form, not as an exegetical method. This distinction between the literary form of allegory and the hermeneutical methodology of ‘allegorizing’ must be kept clear.... ‘Allegorizing’ is an exegetical method that originates with a reader who interprets an author’s words in a manner that the author did not intend” (Stein, “The Genre of Parables.” P. 46).

Craig Blomberg, in *Interpreting the Parables*, makes a strong case that all of the longer parables involve some element of allegory. Maintaining the distinction between allegory (a method of communication) and allegorization (a method of interpretation), his contention is basically that the parables speak on one level in order to communicate a message on another level. Things in the parable represent something in the spiritual realm (e.g., the prodigal = tax collectors; father = Heavenly Father; older brother = Pharisees). In this sense an allegory is an extended metaphor in narrative form.

II. The Purpose of the Kingdom Parables

Matthew 13:10-13 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

¹¹Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. ¹²For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. ¹³Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand."

- A. A Positive Purpose for Those With Ears to Hear, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven"
- B. A Negative Purpose for Those Without Ears to Hear, "to them it has not been granted"

Implications regarding the use of these parables:

(1) We must handle them with caution, particularly the parables expressly stated to have this dual purpose.

The point to be emphasized in all this is that these parables of the Kingdom, even for the saved, must be divinely interpreted in order to serve any beneficial purpose. In no area of the Word of God is there greater need for caution on the part of interpreters than in the parables, and especially for those concerned with the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." Even the most spiritual and well-taught among students of the Word may go astray here; and many an error has found its basis in some parabolic detail, e.g., the gradual and ultimate triumph of the Church in converting the world through the "leavening process" of the Gospel. It is never safe to use either a type or parable to teach something not elsewhere taught directly and clearly in the Word of God (McLain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 324).

(2) We should not minimize or ignore the deliberate "ambiguity" of many parables that is intended to call for reflection (vs. ease of application). This is where Blomberg's view about allegory offers some possible clarification.

"The purposes of allegory closely match both the revelatory and the esoteric purposes for which Christ, according to Mark 4:11-12, spoke in parables. Contemporary analysis largely agrees that there are at least three primary functions of allegory: (a) to illustrate a viewpoint in an artistic and educational way, (b) to keep its message from being immediately clear to all its hearers or readers without further reflection, and (c) to win over its audience to accept a particular set of beliefs or act in a certain way. At first glance (a) and (b) can seem contradictory, but in fact they complement one another in service of (c)" (Interpreting the Parables, pp. 53-54, emphasis original).

The Guidelines for Interpreting the Parables

- A. Avoid Spiritualization or Allegorization
 - 1. Recognize the difference between an allegory and allegorization.
 - a. Allegorization mishandles the text by reading into it meanings which generally: (1) are not indicated or called for by the text itself; (2) reflect the theology of the interpreter; (3) are anachronistic; and (4) would not have been discernible by the original hearers or readers.
 - b. Allegory is a means of communication which uses extended metaphor in narrative form as a parallel or analogy to a deeper truth or meaning.

- 1) A metaphor is “a figure of speech in which a term is transferred from the object it ordinarily designates to an object it may designate only by implicit comparison or analogy” (*American Heritage Dictionary*, p. 825).
 - 2) The key concept, based on the definition of parable, is the comparison or analogy. Any extended parable includes narrative which involves additional metaphors.
- c. Blomberg argues that we can avoid allegorization by acknowledging that the “key to interpreting most allegories lies in recognizing what a small handful of characters, actions or symbols stand for and fitting the rest of the story in with them” (*Interpreting the Parables*, p. 55).
 - d. More specifically, “The main characters of a parable will probably be the most common candidates for allegorical interpretation, and the main points of the parable will most likely be associated with these characters” (*Interpreting the Parables*, p. 166).

If it seems too misleading to call the parables allegorical, and to safeguard against the overly elaborate and anachronistic allegorizing of other eras, we may label them “symbolic” instead. Either way, it is not wrong to see, for example, in the father of the two sons an image of God, to view the prodigal as symbolic of all wayward sinners in need of repentance (including the tax collectors and prostitutes, most notoriously, in Jesus’ world), and to regard the older brother as representing those who think they are God’s followers yet who respond with envy when he lavishes grace on the most obviously undeserving (including many Pharisees in Jesus’ world). Other elements in the passage should not be given symbolic significance unless clear textual indicators point in that direction and unless the import ascribed to them reinforces rather than distracts from the central lessons identifiable through the behavior of the central characters (Craig L. Blomberg, *Preaching the Parables*, p. 24).

2. Treat a parable like all other biblical literature—historical, grammatical, and theological interpretation.

Of particular importance here may be the historical aspect. Zuck points out that “a parable is a story that seeks to illustrate a truth by analogy. Two things, then are being brought together in a parable—a true-to-life incident and the spiritual truth it is illustrating or illuminating. Therefore to understand the spiritual truth properly, it is essential first to comprehend fully the true-to-life incident” (*Basic Bible Interpretation*, p. 211).

One qualifier on this may be that while the parables certainly involve “true-to-life” situations, there is also a common element that is shocking, unexpected, or a reversal of this in order to help make its point. It has often been pointed out, for instance, that the fact that the father runs out to greet the prodigal son is contrary to the cultural expectation of that day. Its true-to-life nature then is the opposite of what one would expect. We must be careful when “reading” and “using” cultural issues to illuminate the text. By overstressing this, I think we can sometimes do a strange “historicist” kind of allegorizing, i.e., we make simple details of the text significant in ways the text doesn’t. I don’t think the parable of the sower, for instance, requires extensive knowledge of first century agricultural practices in order to understand its message.

3. Since many of the parables are little stories, there is an overlap between their interpretation and that of narrative literature.

- a. Plot (what is the crisis and how is it resolved?)
 - b. Characterization (what do the main characters “stand for” and what do they communicate about that?)
- B. Understand the Historical and Literary Context
1. What was the occasion for telling this parable?
 2. How does the parable fit within its immediate context?
 3. Is there any explanation given prior to or following the parable?
- C. Identify the Main Truth(s) Being Illustrated by the Parable
1. A Point of Debate: How many truths are taught in each parable?
 - a. The Majority View of Modern Scholarship: A parable has one main point.

The majority of modern scholarship has been dominated by studies which reacted very negatively to the allegorizing that dominated most of church history. Most evangelical interpreters have been influenced by these studies (at least up until the last 25 years). The common approach is to argue that each parable has a distinct point and that should be sought without given undue attention to the details of the parable. Pentecost sums up this approach, “a parable is designed to teach one essential truth; the details of a parable may be merely incidental” (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 14). Kistemaker sees this as one of the differences between parables and allegory. Parables, he claims “should not be given a point-by-point analysis and interpreted as an allegory, for then they lose their significance” (*The Parables*, p. 11). Zuck draws a connection with how illustrations are used in a sermon, “Usually a parable, like a sermon illustration, is teaching a single truth” (*Basic Bible Interpretation*, p. 215).

- b. The Minority View of Modern Scholarship: Parables may have more than one point, and, in fact, usually do.

Over the past few decades, some scholars have been revisiting this issue in connection with the question of allegory. They have been challenging the “one point” guideline since it seems out of step with how the parables actually function (with the exception of very short ones). Ryken is representative, “Another long-established rule of parable interpretation that is under increasing attack is that the parables can have only one main point. This is an extremely arbitrary rule of interpretation and one that we do not otherwise impose on a work of literature” (*How to Read the Bible as Literature*, p. 149). Blomberg’s has come to the conclusion that there is usually one main point per main character in a parable. His studies have categorized the parables on the basis of points made: (1) simple three point parables (e.g., Matt 21:28-32; 25:1-13); (2) complex three point parables (Matt 20:1-16; 25:14-30); (3) two point parables (e.g., Matt 7:24-27; 24:43-44); and (4) one point parables (e.g., Matt 13:31-32, 44-46).

Observations:

(1) The diversity of interpretative conclusions regarding the proper “one point” message of a parable may indicate that the goal of reducing the parables to a single point is incorrect.

(2) Even advocates of the “one point” rule acknowledge secondary points or truths being made in many of the parables. In fact, seldom are longer parables preached without addressing these points—who preaches the Prodigal Son without addressing the truths communicated via each main character?

(3) The goal of the “one point” rule is admirable (to eliminate fanciful allegorizations), but this same goal can be accomplished without this rule. Allowing the text to control the process is the safest guard.

(4) While granting the arguments of the “multiple points” position, I am not convinced that there isn’t an overarching theme (or “big idea”) to each parable. Just as the theme of an epistolary passage may be an abstraction or summation of the developmental ideas in that passage, so the theme of a parable may be the abstraction of the main points in it.

2. Separate the primary details from the secondary information.

3. Validate the main truths from other Scripture.

D. Note the Actual or Intended Response of the Hearers

III. The Guidelines for Preaching Parables

A. The theme of the sermon should be the same as the parable’s theme.

1. A sermon theme is the combination of subject (what’s the sermon about) and complement (what the sermon says about the subject). This is drawn directly from the exegetical theme of the parable, i.e., you have identified what the parable is about (its subject) and what it is saying about that subject (its complement).
2. Caveat: For those parables which it seems too difficult to summarize the main points into one theme statement, it would be better to preach the main points than to ignore them. In other words, faithfulness to the text takes priority over homiletical organization.

B. The structure of the sermon probably should be simplified to get to the heart of the truth:

1. The Story (accentuating the tension and/or comparison)
2. The Main Point(s)
3. The Application(s)

Whose Son is Jesus?

Matthew 1:1-25

Review:

1. The message of each Gospel focuses on the person and work of Jesus Christ. Each has its unique emphasis, and that emphasis is communicated through the selection, arrangement, and adaptation of the Lord’s ministry and teaching.

- a. We know that the Gospel writers choose their materials selectivity because John tells us that Jesus did more than could be contained in the four gospels (21:25).
 - b. We can tell simply by reading them that the Gospel writers felt liberty to arrangement the materials according to their own purpose for writing. A simple example of this is the record of the Lord's temptations as found in Matthew and Luke. In Matthew's account it goes wilderness, Temple, high mountain, but in Luke's the order is wilderness, high mountain, then the Temple. Neither text makes the claim that theirs is the correct order of temptations, and most conclude that Luke rearranges them because he places a good bit of emphasis on Jerusalem in his gospel.
 - c. We see adaptation in the way that the stories are tailored to the writer's purpose. An example of this is the record of John the Baptist's preaching near the time of the Lord's baptism. Matthew and Luke record the same message, but Luke includes more material from his preaching and the events surrounding it. We get a more full picture from Luke, but Matthew's presentation fits within Luke's and also shows us one of his key themes—conflict with the Pharisees and Sadducees.
2. I believe that the message of Matthew can be summarized in this way: *Jesus Christ, the Messiah promised in the OT, was rejected by Israel, so His kingdom has been postponed until after His disciples have fulfilled the Great Commission.*
3. Matthew does not waste any time establishing the first part of that theme—Jesus is the Messiah promised in the OT. The opening chapters of this gospel are specifically intended to lay this foundation.
 - a. Chapter 1 provides the record of His origin and rightful claim as Messiah.
 - b. Chapter 2 interweaves the themes of acceptance and rejection around three key geographical locations connected to the childhood and pre-ministry life of the Lord (Bethlehem, Egypt, and Nazareth).
 - c. Chapter 3 reveals that John the Baptist was the one who would prepare the way for the Lord.
 - d. Chapter 4:1-16 completes the preparation for the Messiah's ministry by showing His defeat of Satan and OT announcement of His ministry.
4. We will walk through the first two chapters pretty quickly mainly because I have preached a series through them years ago and my goal is to summarize their message in preparation for the central message of the book. Matthew wrote them as something of an introduction or prologue, so we will read them that way. I believe the central subject of the first chapter can be understood in the term Sonship. Whose Son is Jesus?

I. The Son of David

- This is the main point of the genealogy: (1) order in v. 1; (2) emphasis in v. 6; (3) arrangement centers on David, v. 17; (4) use of 14 as key.
- The title "Son of David" is significant in Matthew: 12:23; 21:9, 15.

II. The Son of Abraham

- The obvious reason for inclusion of Abraham is the connection to the Abrahamic covenant—if Jesus is a descendant of David, He is of Abraham, so mention wasn't really needed. It is purposeful.
- Abrahamic covenant had universal aspects to it—all nations, cf. 28:19; 8:11-12.
- This is probably also the reason for including the four women which precede Mary.

III. The Son of God, vv. 18-25

- A miraculous birth was essential for Christ's deity.
- This was prophesied in the OT (Isa 7:14; 9:6). Isaiah 9:6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
- It has redemptive significance.

- The only way salvation could be accomplished was for God to become man, and salvation is only received by recognizing this, 2:15; 3:17; 4:3,6; 14:33; 16:16.

Conclusion:

- He will rule on David's throne over Israel and the nations.
- He will be the channel of Abrahamic blessing to the nations.
- He will be the One who can provide redemption for mankind.

The Messiah Promised in the OT

Matthew 2:1-23

Introduction:

1. Matthew's message: Jesus Christ, the Messiah promised in the OT, was rejected by Israel, so His kingdom has been postponed until after His disciples have fulfilled the Great Commission.
2. These opening chapters are prologue to the book which lay the groundwork for the claim that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah promised in the OT. Chapter one focuses on the Lord's royal ancestry and divine character—He is both the Son of David and the Son of God.
3. The second chapter of Matthew's gospel covers the first thirty years of the Lord's life (cf. Luke 3:23). To be more specific, the movements in this chapter actually happen within the first 12 years of His life, since we know from Luke (2:42) that Jesus lived in Nazareth by the time He was twelve. Matthew's point here, then, cannot be to give a detailed history of the infancy and early life of the Lord.
4. What is Matthew's point then? I would like to suggest that he really is making two points in this chapter. One is direct, while the other is indirect.

I. The Early Life of Jesus Fulfilled the Prophecy and Patterns in the OT

It seems as if the chapter is woven around the four references to the OT (vv. 6, 15, 18, 23). The stories all point toward these references, and each of them is tied to something of geographical significance (Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth). It is could possible that Matthew is saying just enough to provide an explanation for questions that would be in the mind of Jewish people regarding Jesus of Nazareth: wasn't the Messiah to be born in Bethlehem? How could the Messiah be from Nazareth? Remember Nathanael's question—"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 2:46). Also, the religious leaders objected to the Lord with these words, "Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee (John 7:52). By providing a clear explanation of why Jesus grew up in Nazareth instead of Bethlehem, Matthew anticipates and heads off these questions.

A. Jesus Fulfilled the Prophecy Regarding the Messiah's Birth in Bethlehem, 2:1-12

This is the main portion of the chapter because it drives the central theme of Jesus messianic claim. Note the connection between the question of the Magi (v. 2) and the question by Herod in v. 4—they speak of the "King of the Jews" and he knows that this is "the Messiah." When asked, the religious leaders provide the correct answer according to Micah 5:2.

B. Jesus Fit the Pattern of God's Son being Called out of Egypt, 2:13-21

The second OT reference is a notoriously difficult one since it has historical application to the people of Israel in the Exodus and raises the question in what way does Jesus fulfill this OT text? It is important for us to allow the NT to define the word "fulfill" rather than impose our sense of it on the text. We normally think of a direct prediction and a precise fulfillment, but the biblical concept is larger than that, cf. 3:15; 5:17. In this case, I believe that Matthew is drawing a comparison between the Lord and Israel based on the Sonship theme. Israel's was God's son, but failed to keep God's covenant. Jesus will now be the Son who is completely faithful. In this sense, Jesus follows the pattern that Israel set and fulfills the potential of all that Israel should have been. The fulfillment is simply in the point of comparison (Son out of Egypt), cf. v. 18 where the point of comparison is grief.

C. Jesus Fit the Pattern of Scorn Shown toward the Messiah, 2:22-23

This last reference is also very difficult in that there is no place in the OT that contains these exact words. It is best, then, to not view it as a quotation of a specific text. We are tipped off to this by the use of the word prophets

(plural vs. singular) in v. 23. In other words, this is a summary, not quotation, of what the prophets had predicted. I believe the point here ties back to what I mentioned earlier about the scorn associated with Nazareth. The OT prophets mentioned the scorn and rejection of the Messiah, and the Lord's home in Nazareth was indicative of that (cf. Acts 24:5 "sect of the Nazarenes").

II. The Early Responses to the Messiah Anticipate the Responses to the Messiah's Ministry

- A. Gentiles worship Him, vv. 2, 11.
- B. The Jewish religious leaders are apathetic toward Him
- C. Political leaders set out to kill Him.

Preparing the Way for the Messiah

Matthew 3:1-10

Focus: Preparation for the Kingdom demands genuine repentance.

I. The Man

A. His Title/Label, “John the Baptist”

It is not clear if John bore this label during his ministry. It is quite possible that he did, but by the time Matthew writes John is clearly known as the Baptist (or Baptizer). The title fits his ministry since he called people to public baptism as a symbol of their repentance (cf. v. 6; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). Some of tried to identify John's baptism with ritual washings that others performed, but there seems to be no basis for this claim. Those were repeated rituals, but John's baptism was a one-time act which demonstrated repentance on the part of those who received it. His baptism is really the precursor to Christian baptism, yet different from it in that the symbol of Christian baptism is the finished work of Christ and it is done in the name of the Triune God.

B. His Location, “in the wilderness of Judea”

This is a desert area along the Jordan down toward the Dead Sea. It would be closer to Jericho than Jerusalem, on the east side of the Jordan in an area often called Perea (cf. John 1:28 “Bethany beyond the Jordan”). This would constitute probably a 15-20 mile walk from Jerusalem through the hills and mountains to the site of John's ministry, cf. v. 5. The significance of his location in the wilderness is brought out in the prophecy from Isaiah 40:3 quoted in v. 3 (“the voice of one crying in the wilderness”).

C. His Lifestyle, v. 4; cf. 2 Kings 1:8

John makes quite an impression by virtue of his lifestyle—he is a rugged wilderness man. While his diet may sound strange to us, it seems that this was not an uncommon diet for those who lived in these wilderness regions. His description in v. 4 seems deliberately intended to evoke images of the prophet Elijah. Listen to how Elijah is described 2 Kings 1:8, “He was a hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins.” John's connection to Elijah becomes an important element in Matthew's gospel (cf. 11:13-15; 17:11-13).

II. His Ministry

A. Preparation, vv. 3-4, cf. v. 11

The best description for John's ministry is the word preparation, cf. v. 3, “Make ready the way of the LORD, make His paths straight!” He is the forerunner for the Messiah, so his job is to call people to be ready for the One who is coming (v. 11). John is an incredible character not only blessed by God with a pivotal ministry at the turning of the ages, but also praised by the Lord Himself as being a very special person, “among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist!” (Matt 11:11).

Yet, in spite of this incredible privilege and praise, John humbly understood what his role in God's program was to be. When his followers became upset that the crowds were turning to Jesus, John replied with these words:

A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. ²⁸You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent ahead of Him.’ ²⁹He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. ³⁰He must increase, but I must decrease (John 3:27-30).

B. Preaching, v. 1; cf. Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3

Even though he bares the name, John the Baptist, we should not forget that his primary ministry was that of preaching. He is described here as a herald who proclaimed a message. We'll look at the content of that message in a moment, but it is important not to miss the focus on proclamation in John's ministry. This is implied in the prophecy from Isaiah where his ministry is simply described as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" (v. 3). John was a voice for God.

The other Synoptic Gospels lay the stress even more clearly on John's preaching ministry. Mark 1:4 says, "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Luke 3:3 says, "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." It is very clear that baptism was centrally connected to John's ministry, but it was not simply a religious ritual that he performed and to which they submitted. It was vitally connected to a message that was proclaimed by John.

III. His Message

A. The Nearness of the Kingdom, v. 2; cf. 4:17; 10:7; 12:28

John's message focuses on the nearness of the Kingdom, it is at hand or has come near to them. This is the same message that Jesus will preach (4:17) and will commission His disciples to preach throughout the cities of Israel (10:7). 12:28 helps us understand what is meant by the phrase "is at hand." There Jesus states that if certain things are true, and they are, then "the kingdom of God has come upon you."

Why is it called the Kingdom of Heaven? The title "kingdom of heaven" is used only by Matthew (32 times), but he does use "kingdom of God" four times (12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43). Some older dispensationalists made a distinction between these two (e.g., Scofield), but this isn't valid. (1) "enter the kingdom of heaven" is used parallel to "enter the kingdom of God" (19:23-24); (2) There are an abundance of parallels where Matthew's "kingdom of heaven" is presented as "kingdom of God" by either Mark or Luke (cf. 4:17 with Mark 1:15; 11:11 with Luke 7:28; 13:11 with Mark 4:11 and Luke 8:10; 13:31 with Mark 4:30; 19:14 with Mark 10:14 and Luke 18:16. The designation "kingdom of heaven" seems best explained as rooted in Daniel's prophecies about the future. The interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's vision regarding the image ends with the announcement that "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed" (Dan 2:44). Daniel 7 contains a vision of "One like a Son of Man" whose "kingdom is one which will not be destroyed" (vv. 13-14).

The kingdom of heaven is the same as the kingdom of God, and both are the kingdom that was promised in the OT to David's Son. John was proclaiming that the Kingdom promised in the OT was at hand because the Messiah was at hand. The One who would fulfill the promises was about to appear. We will learn more about the kingdom being offered by the Lord, but it is important to understand that John and Jesus were preaching the nearness of a kingdom which was promised in the OT, and that was the expectation of His disciples (cf. Acts 1:6 "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"). Contrary to what is commonly preached and taught in our day, Jesus did not redefine the OT promises from a literal kingdom into a spiritual kingdom.

What about the Lord's statement that "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21 KJV and NIV)? (1) The word translated "within" (*entos*) can also mean "in the midst of" or "among" (BDAG, 341) and this is how it is translated by NASB, ESV, and HCSB. (2) The question put to the Lord is not "where" is the kingdom, but "when the kingdom of God was coming." (3) It seems very improbable, almost to the point of impossible, that the Lord would tell a group of Pharisees that the "kingdom of God is within you" given His consistent rebuke and rejection of them.

John was proclaiming the coming of the One who was the Messianic King of the Jews.

B. The Need for Genuine Repentance, vv. 2, 6, 7-10

What is often missed or misunderstood about the dispensationalist view of the Kingdom is that it was a kingdom that must be received on the basis of genuine repentance. For some reason, some people seem to think that the dispensationalist position is that Jesus was offering them an unspiritual kingdom—one only of political and material prosperity. But that completely misses the point. The Kingdom promised in the OT does involve political and material

prosperity, but these are rooted in a proper spiritual relationship to the King. Israel had turned away from God, so the path back was one of repentance. Unless they repent, they will not see the Kingdom.

John, and Jesus, called for a genuine repentance, not some kind of religious show or ritual. The emphasis on genuineness is clear in v. 6, “confessing their sins.” It is also brought to the forefront in John’s confrontation with the Pharisees and Sadducees in vv. 7-10. the NIV is probably right to translate v. 7 as “coming to where he was baptizing” (vs. NASB). It is doubtful that these men were coming to be baptized. It is possible, but doubtful. If they were, then John detects their hypocrisy in doing so and confronts it.

Of particular importance is John’s emphasis on “fruit in keeping with repentance.” Genuine repentance is always evidenced in a changed life. The concept of fruit is helpful here because it points to why the change happens—something has happened to the root of the tree (cf. 7:17-19; 12:33). Genuine repentance clearly acknowledges one’s sinfulness, agrees with God about it, and seeks pardon from God for it.

The reference to Abraham’s children in v. 9 is tied to the prevailing view that physical heritage would qualification enough for receiving the blessings of Abraham, which included the kingdom. John tackles this head on—there must be a turning of the heart or there will be no blessing from God. The urgency of the need for repentance is found in the warning about the judgment that was coming (v. 10).

The Baptism of Jesus

Matthew 3:11-17

Review:

- Preparation for the Messiah demands genuine repentance.
- Genuine repentance is the kind that bears fruit.
- The P & S were not genuinely repenting because they were resting in their heritage and self-righteousness.

I. Proclamation of the Messiah's Ministry, vv. 11-12

A. The Contrast of His Ministry, "as for me...but He who is coming"

John acknowledges his role as preparatory for the One who is coming. His baptism is one of repentance that prepares the way for Another. That One is described as being "mightier than I" and One for whom John views himself as a servant "fit to remove His sandals." In John's gospel, the Baptist also confesses that the One is coming existed before he did.

B. The Character of His Ministry

The exalted power and position of the Messiah will result in a ministry that goes beyond the call to repentance. It will be a ministry of purification and judgment. Instead baptizing in/with water, the Messiah will baptize in/with the Holy Spirit and fire. Before we deal directly with what "baptize with the Holy Spirit" means, we must decide if "and fire" is the same thing or a different thing. In other words, is John announcing one or two baptisms? It seems that most take it as one baptism, i.e., Holy Spirit and fire are the same baptism. While I appreciate the arguments that they base this on (one article for both words; tongues of fire in Acts 2), I am not convinced that it is one baptism. My reasons:

1. All four Gospels record John's statement about baptizing with the Holy Spirit, but only Matthew and Luke add the statement "and fire." Only Matthew and Luke also record the statement about judgment which immediately follows it. Mark and John only mention being baptized with the Spirit, and do not record the "winnowing fork" statement.
2. The use of fire as judgment in the next verse corresponds to this mention.
3. The book of Acts also drops the "and fire" when it refers to the baptism of the Spirit (Acts 1:5; 11:16).
4. The grammatical argument is weakened by the fact that these words follow a verb, not a noun, i.e., baptize vs. baptism. Even with nouns, it isn't an iron clad rule.

So, I take "and fire" to be a reference to the judgment that Messiah will bring upon those who do not repent. John the Baptist is announcing that the coming of the Messiah would bring blessing and judgment—something predicted in the OT.

What does "baptize you with the Holy Spirit" mean? We find the answer in the books of Acts and 1 Corinthians. The combination of Acts 1:5, 2:1-4; 11:15-17 show that Spirit baptism was the initially outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, and that this was repeated as the Gospel spread to new groups (Samaritans and Gentiles). Paul gives us a theological statement about it in 1 Corinthians 12:13. Spirit baptism is the work of the Spirit to place believers into the body of Christ.

The Messiah's ministry, John proclaims, will be marked by the power and presence of the Spirit and judgment.

II. Demonstration of the Messiah's Humility, vv. 13-15

In contrast to the self-righteous, hypocritical Pharisees, the Lord comes to be baptized by John. This scene poses a couple of difficulties for us: (1) why was John hesitant to baptize Jesus? And (2) why did Jesus want to get baptized if it was a baptism of repentance?

The first problem may seem more simple than it is. The most obvious answer is that John didn't want to baptize Jesus because he knew that Jesus was the Messiah, but there is a problem with that answer. The Gospel of John states pretty plainly that John did not know who the Messiah was until after the baptism:

John 1:32-34 John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. ³³I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."

This being the case, it is probably best to see John as acknowledging the righteous life of Jesus, i.e., John knows that Jesus does not need a baptism of repentance because John knows about the character of Jesus.

That leads to the second question, why did Jesus want to get baptized? Being the sinless Son of God, He did not need to repent of any sins. So why submit to John's baptism? The Lord's own answer is in v. 15. The first thing we should notice is the phrase "at this time" since it indicates that Jesus sees some significance in the moment. Something important is to happen "at this time."

Second, while there is debate about what it exactly means, I take the phrase "fulfill all righteousness" as a statement of Jesus's commitment to do His Father's will. It was clear that John the Baptist was a God-ordained messenger calling Israel to be ready for the Messiah. Jesus submits to John's baptism because He was an Israelite who followed God. Matthew 21:25 helps us understand the Lord's viewpoint on this. Luke 7:29-30 also point out the significance of John's baptism in terms of God's purposes.

As we will see later in the book, Jesus will teach that entrance into the kingdom requires genuine humility. The Pharisees and Sadducees do not possess this kind of humility—that's why they rejected John's baptism. The Lord, however, not only claimed to be genuinely humble (11:29), He demonstrated it by submitting to John's baptism.

III. Announcement of the Messiah's Identity, vv. 16-17

These verses bring a two-fold identification of the Messiah—the Spirit's descent and the Father's voice. The Spirit's descent should be understood in Messianic terms, i.e., of the Messiah's anointing with the Spirit for ministry, cf. Luke 4:18 (Isa 61:1-2); Acts 10:38. This was the anointing which came upon the leaders of Israel, for example, 1 Samuel 16:13-14 say, "Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah. ¹⁴Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul..."

It is not entirely clear who saw the Spirit's descent, particularly in this passage. The NASB takes the first "he" as referring to John since it doesn't capitalize it. This makes sense because John's gospel informs us that the Baptist saw this happen. We don't know who beyond the Lord and John noticed this.

The second identifier is a voice out of the heavens. Since the voice calls Jesus "My beloved Son" it is clear that this is the Father's voice. These words reflect the OT texts of Psalm 2:7 ("My Son") and Isaiah 42:1 ("My chosen one in whom My soul delights") and combine to be a clear messianic reference. The Isaiah text also contains these words "I have put My Spirit upon Him" and so fit the baptism scene perfectly.

Conclusion:

1. Message: prep for the Messiah demands genuine repentance.
2. Jesus of Nazareth is God's messiah!

The Ultimate S.A.T. (Satanic Assault Test) Matthew 4:1-11

Focus: The Lord's testing in the wilderness proved His complete commitment to His Father's will.

I. The Nature of Testing

A. Testing is always under God's control, "was led up by the Spirit"

Jesus was led by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil. It was God's will for Him to face this test/temptation. Satan is the agent, the one who actually tempts. Yet God is in control. James 1:14 is clear that God does not tempt anyone because that is contrary to His character (He takes no pleasure in sin). God never entices anyone to commit sin. But He is sovereign over all things, so the circumstances in which we find ourselves are within His purposes—He has either directed us or permitted us to encounter the tests we face.

It is very important for us to remember the extent of God's control. Nothing which confronts you comes outside of God's plan and permission. This truth brings the meaning of 1 Corinthians 10:13 home more powerfully—*God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able*. God, who controls everything and knows you completely, will not let you be tempted beyond your capability with His help to gain victory.

This means that each test must be met with faith, with trust in God's sovereign control and power to supply your every need. The only other option is fear. The fear may be evidenced in many different ways, but it is fear nonetheless. Fear that the test will break you rather than build you up, destroy you rather than develop you.

In the face of fear, we must respond with faith in God's control. It's as if you are walking across a bridge that extends farther out with each step you take—the next section doesn't shoot out until you take the step. Each step will be met with a solid place to stand, but you have to take the step first. God has promised that He will be faithful, so you need to keep taking steps of faith.

While I am inclined to see something more direct for Jesus in the phrase "was led up by the Spirit" than what we probably experience, I don't think that we should conclude it has no application to us. Romans 8:14 says "all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." God's Spirit is at work in believers to direct their lives into obedience to God's will. The main thing we must be concerned about in finding God's will is God's Word. So, when we are being tested, it should press us to God's Word for the direction we need. As we find it in the Scriptures, we can be absolutely sure that God will honor His Word—the bridge for the next step will be provided if we trust God and step out.

B. Testing is not a sign of God's displeasure, cf. 3:17

The Father does not plan this test in order to zap the Son; He has already expressed His pleasure with His Son (3:17). There is something twisted in the human heart that consistently jumps to the conclusion that difficulty is the result of God's displeasure—remember Job's friends, the disciples regarding the man born blind, or the pagans who watched Paul get bit by a snake.

The Bible presents a very different picture of things. Hebrews 12:6-8 says, "FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." ⁷It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons." God brings tests into the life of His children out of His love for them. And Hebrews 12:10 says that God does it for our good—"disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness."

I think we all know that there are two types of discipline—corrective and character forming. When a child does something wrong, we must use corrective discipline to do some foolishness removal (cf. Pro 22:15). That is the most loving thing we can do—if we neglect such discipline then we prove that we really love ourselves more than that child. A child left to himself comes to ruin—personal and spiritual destruction.

We also must impose a kind of discipline which is aimed at building character. By giving the child chores and tasks, we develop the child's sense of responsibility, work ethic, and commitment to be a servant, not just served. When we allow the child to face challenges and pressures, we develop that child's fortitude, resolve, and endurance. You want to destroy your child's character? Then do everything for him or her, and protect him or her from every bump in life.

If you love your child, you will use discipline to correct and construct his character. God does the same thing. And here's what's really important to remember—God knows exactly what we need changed and what will change it! As a human parent, I may have doubts about whether my correction is on target and appropriate, and I may doubt whether I am allowing too much pressure or not enough. God has none of these doubts—He always knows and does what is right. And He does it because He loves us.

C. Testing is designed to reveal what is in our hearts, cf. Deut 8:1-5, esp. v. 2.

Notice the parallels between these two passages:

Deut 8:1-5	Matt 4:1-4
God has led you	led by the Spirit
into the wilderness	into the wilderness
Forty years	forty days and nights
testing you	to be tempted
let you be hungry	became hungry
his son	Son of God

It seems that you cannot escape the conclusion that Jesus was identifying with the people of Israel's time of testing in the wilderness, a test which they failed, but He will not. God's purpose in this test, for Israel and Jesus, was to test and to teach. The test was one of heart commitment; the teaching was of experiential obedience and fullness of ministry preparation (cf. Heb 5:8).

Pressure squeezes us and then we find out what's inside of us! When life is humming along quietly and pleasantly, it's easy to play the game and give the appropriate responses—the clichés can roll off our lips. When we find ourselves in the middle of a challenging test, then what's inside gets exposed. What we really treasure. What we really trust. What we really think and feel. Even if it is painful, this is very good for us. If we are serious about being like Jesus Christ, then we should want to have the un-Christlike areas of our lives exposed to the light of God's Word.

II. The Point of Testing: God or Self-centered?

The Lord willing, we will look more carefully at each test next week, but I wanted to look at them this morning from the perspective of what they have in common. What's the unifying center of all three tests? I believe the answer that could be stated as a question, "Who's will matters most, the Father's or the Son's?" In essence, each test touches the issue of whether Jesus the Messiah, God's Son, will live in complete submission to His Father's will.

How so? Each test called for Jesus to act in a self-centered way: (1) use the privilege of His Sonship to feed Himself; (2) force God to rescue Him; and (3) get the kingdom without the Cross. And the Lord's response in each case revolved around God His Father: (1) living by what comes from Him; (2) not putting Him to the test; and (3) worshipping and serving only Him.

We will examine these tests and how Jesus handles them more specifically, but let's not miss the main point—Jesus passes the test because He was utterly and completely committed to His Father. To use our language, He was completely God-centered. It wasn't about Him—not His needs, ego, or agenda. It was about doing the Father's will.

- A. Satisfy His Appetite or Trust God to Provide?
- B. Force God's Hand or Live According to God's Principles?
- C. Take a Short Cut or Follow God's Plan?

III. The Outcome of the Testing: A Faithful Son and High Priest

But how can this test of Christ be for His good? Two ways: (1) it was a necessary portion of His mission, i.e. identifying with His people in temptation (cf. Heb 4:15; Deut 8:1-3); and (2) Hebrews 5:8 tells us that the Son learned obedience, i.e. experienced it, through the things which He suffered.

Conclusion:

1. I am not sure what you are facing now, or will face in the future, but, if you are God's child, I can assure that His purpose for you is loving and good. No matter what you face, God is committed to you and will always remain faithful to you. Trust Him! Don't live in fear; walk by faith!
2. See the benefits in your trials and temptations—they are opportunities to see what's in your heart and have God change you for His glory. He's preparing you for eternity, so don't run from it.
3. At the core, the issue that confronts all of us is whether our lives are centered on God or ourselves. If God matters more to us than anything else, we will prove to be faithful sons like Jesus Christ! He lead the way and offers the grace we need to follow!

Food or the Father?

Matthew 4:3-4

I. The First Test, v. 3

Explanation:

The first test presents an interesting challenge in trying to identify exactly what would have been sinful if the Lord had taken Satan's challenge. Clearly, bread is not sinful and eating is not inherently sinful either, so what really is the test or temptation being put before the Lord here? Why would it be wrong for Jesus to do this?

I believe the issue at stake here is submission to His Father's will. Satan is urging Jesus to act independently or apart from His Father's will by doing this for Himself.

(1) It is clear that Jesus is in the wilderness because the Spirit led Him there, and I think we can conclude from this that His fasting was part of God's will for Him right then—to break the fast by making food would be to depart from what God wanted Him to be doing.

(2) Later in His ministry, Jesus will make it clear that He did not work at His own initiative, but according to the Father's will: "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 5:30) and "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38). The Son used His miraculous power to do the Father's will, not just to prove Who He was. In fact, He only proved this when it was the Father's will to do so.

(3) Theologically, this is a crucial part of the incarnation—the eternal Son of God took human flesh so He could experience the conditions of genuine humanity. It was an essential element of His self-humbling and what we call, in theological terms, the kenosis. The manifestation of the Son's glory was subjected to the Father's will (cf. John 17:5 "Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was"). His miracles were clearly a manifestation of His glory (John 2:11), so if He performed this miracle it would have been a self-centered display of His glory.

The point of temptation was whether Jesus would use His miraculous power independently of His Father's will. It was a test of submission to God's will. The force of this test is probably intensified by the fact that the *lure* or *bait* was not inherently sinful. If Jesus can use His miraculous power to feed 5000, why can't He feed Himself?

Application:

The timeless, universal point is this: *It is sinful to pursue gratification or satisfaction apart from or contrary to God's will.*

When we do this, we are exalting our wills over God's will. The most obvious times when we do this are when we pursue illegitimate appetites—things clearly forbidden by God's Word. But this text forces us to think more carefully about the more subtle danger that we all confront—the potential for sin that is hidden inside of legitimate needs and appetites.

I would argue that most temptations twist some good gift from God into a sinful abuse of it. What God gave us to enjoy for His glory becomes a rebellious act of idolatry. How? Even legitimate desires can be sinful when they exist at inordinate levels and are satisfied at improper times and in illegitimate ways. When any of these three problems occur, it reveals that we have built an idol that has pushed God out of the center of our worship.

Inordinate Level of Desire (Lust)

The great commandment for all humanity is to love God, so when we love anything more than God it is sinful and idolatrous. We are giving to something which was created what rightfully belongs only to the Creator. Matthew 6:24 helps us understand the problem here. Only one thing can master us. That one thing is the supreme love of our lives and therefore exercises control over us—we serve it. Jesus places two opposing masters before us—God or wealth. Now, don't immediately think money (though that is part of it). It really is broader than cash—the context goes on to deal with food, clothing, and length of life. All good things in themselves, but not things that should be our

master (cf. 6:33). So, if our desire for these things exceeds our desire for God, if these things control us, then our appetite has become our god.

While we must reject pagan philosophies that treat the material world as inherently sinful, we must also be careful not to recognize that the Bible warns us very clearly about being slaves to our desires and cravings in this world. Our lives were controlled by the desires of the flesh prior to conversion (Eph 2:3; 4:22), but now are to be controlled by God's will (1 Peter 4:2) and Spirit (Eph 5:18). While we live in this world, we must realize that the world constantly lures us to live for the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life (1 John 2:16). Or, as Peter says, "fleshly lusts wage war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11).

Our hearts really are idol factories. Something good becomes an idol when it draws our affection and devotion away from God to it. It becomes an idol when it causes our love for God to decrease. Something good becomes idolatrous when it gets us so entangled in this world (what 2 Tim 2:4 calls "the affairs of everyday life") that we don't have time to worship, fellowship with, and serve our God.

Improper Timing

Clearly eating is not sinful, so there must be something about the timing of this meal that would have violated the Father's will for Jesus. Legitimate needs can only be met at legitimate times. Most things in life have appropriate times and seasons in God's plan, and doing them "out of season" is a violation of God's boundaries.

"Many of life's most important joys, privileges, and responsibilities have a time tag on them. They belong to certain days, or to the end of a set span of years, or to a certain level of maturity. To grab them too soon is to spoil them. Yet if our typical modern character has any weakness more outstanding than another it is this inability to wait. 'I want what I want when I want it' is the prevailing approach to life" (Richard Shelley Taylor, *The Disciplined Life*, pp. 93-94).

This is an admittedly subjective area since it is often difficult to know the specifics of God's direction for our lives. Difficult though it may be, we must learn to walk at God's pace, not our own. Practically, when we have to push through closed doors, even in pursuit of some good and legitimate goal, we run the risk of running ahead of God's will.

Illegitimate Means/Ways

There is nothing inherently wrong with the Lord satisfying His need for food, but it seems clear that performing a miracle to do so would have been illegitimate, i.e., contrary to God's will for Him. The principle for us is that it is possible to pursue the right goal in the wrong way. Or, to use a phrase with which we are probably familiar, the end does not justify the means.

If we break God's rules or disregard His instructions for us, even in the pursuit of something good, we are sinning. We have elevated that good thing above God Himself. We must do the right thing in the right way. Examples: (1) provide for family via dishonesty; (2) discipline children via unrighteous anger; (3) pursue marriage contrary to God's Word.

II. The First Response, v. 4

- Bread sustains physical life, but that's not the only kind of life or even the most important kind of life!
- Jesus will teach His disciples later that His food was to do the will of the One who sent Him.
- Nothing in this world satisfies the heart fully; only God can do that.
- The response to the temptation of legitimate needs is love for God that is manifested in trust in God.

Trusting or Testing God?

Matthew 4:5-10

Introduction:

1. Temptations...
2. The first test that the Lord was faced forced a choice between food or His Father. Would He act independently or submissively? The timeless, universal principle is that *it is sinful to pursue gratification or satisfaction apart from or contrary to God's will*. The Lord's answer, in v. 4, reminds us that bread may sustain physical life, but that's not the only kind of life or even the most important kind of life! What we really need is what comes from God because God alone can truly satisfy the deepest needs we have.
3. Focus: Faithfulness is demonstrated by submissive faith that is really to endure the path obedience rather than force God to act or by pass difficulty.

I. The Second Test: Trusting or Testing?

Explanation:

The second test comes in the form of a journey to Jerusalem ("the holy city") which results in Jesus standing "on pinnacle of the temple" (v. 4). The exact spot on the temple is unclear, but it is enough to know that it was a high point, possibly on one of the edges that overlooked the Kidron Valley which may have been as high as 180 feet. Some take the challenge that Satan sets before Jesus as related to an expectation that the Messiah would suddenly appear on the Temple and prove His Messianic character by tossing Himself down before the people. Two problems with this view are that it comes from a later tradition and nothing in the context mentions any witnesses to this act.

The point really focuses on Satan's effort to get Jesus to confuse presumption for faith—to test God rather than simply trust Him. The devil quotes the promises of God in Psalm 91:11-12 as the basis for his challenge to Jesus that He throw Himself down. The psalm recounts the security of those who trust in the Lord, and, of course, Jesus fits that description perfectly. What Satan does, however, is misapply the passage. The text says nothing about deliberately creating circumstances which demand divine deliverance. It offers security and protection within God's will, not in the pursuit of ours.

Jesus recognizes what Satan is asking Him to do. His response exposes the deceit of Satan's test in two ways:

(1) Before Jesus quoting an OT text, He uses these words, "On the other hand, it is written..." The point of these words is to demonstrate that the devil has misused the Scripture that he quoted. Because what Satan suggested violates other clear Scripture, he cannot be applying it correctly. It doesn't mean what Satan says it means.

(2) Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 to show that what Satan asks Him to do is the same thing that the Israelites did in the wilderness, i.e., they put God to the test. The Deuteronomy text refers back to the event that is recorded in Exodus 17:1-7. In verse 2, Moses asks them "Why do you test the LORD?" by demanding that the LORD miraculously provide water for them. The key to why this is a test is found in verse 7, "because they tested the LORD, saying, 'Is the LORD among us, or not?'" They were testing God by demanding that He perform miracles in order to show His presence and prove His faithfulness. Satan is attempting to get Jesus to do the exact same thing—throw Yourself down and see if God will protect you.

The root of this sin is a question over who is in charge—God or the person who is putting Him to the test? Genuine faith operates within God's plan and according to God's principles. There is a real difference between trusting God or putting Him to the test, between faith and foolishness.

Application:

Does this test have any parallels in our lives? Are we ever in danger of putting God to the test? Yes.

- (1) If we misuse the Scriptures in order to claim something that is contrary to or violates other clear Scripture.
- (2) If we fail to exercise wise, biblically-based, responsibility, then expect God to bail us out or do something miraculous to protect or provide for us. For example, someone who doesn't work, yet claims to be living by faith for God to provide. Or someone who does not take normal, reasonable safety pre-cautions.

(3) If someone acts rashly or presumptuously under the guise of “stepping out by faith” then can be guilty here.

I want to be careful here because we must walk by faith and not by sight. But genuine faith is biblical faith, so we must make sure we have biblical grounds for what we claim by faith. As far as I can tell, everyone in the Bible who goes somewhere on faith has been told by God to do it. That’s what makes it faith—they can trust God to keep His Word. For those of us who no longer have such special revelation, then we probably need to be more circumspect in how we describe it.

When put God to the test whenever we make a decision that de facto forces God to act in order to rescue us from its consequences. In that sense, I don’t think pastors and missionaries are testing God when they go out in obedience to the Great Commission. I do think that pastors and missionaries test God when they make commitments, without biblical warrant, that demand extraordinary deliverance from God in order to prove His faithfulness. Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego are good example of genuinely stepping out in faith—they were hoping for deliverance and prepared for death. They weren’t demanding from God something He hadn’t explicitly promised. Plenty of believers have died in the fire, but in their case God was pleased for them not to burn.

Let’s put into a contemporary example—Oak Forest Baptist Temple. They “stepped out by faith” to build their new building and that thing sat as an empty shell until the church was almost destroyed. They never built that building. The long-time pastor was asked to leave and the church eventually had to re-organize and move to another city. Did God fail them or was their claim to “step out by faith” really putting God to the test? I know God didn’t fail them, so, as much as I hate to say it, the answer must be that they sinned in putting God to the test. And I believe I can say that based on the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to what He said about “building projects”—“For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?” (Luke 14:28).

Part of my concern is mindset and terminology—good people say things that are not really intended to mean they are putting God to the test; they are just using popular phrases. The danger is that we live in a culture, particularly the Christian sub-culture, which has a distorted concept of faith—faith is a magical charm that guarantees success. If we believe, everything turns out okay. The fact is, however, that this is contrary to the Scriptures and the experience of godly believers through the centuries. Hebrews 11 says that believers *by faith* both “escaped the edge of the sword” and “were put to death with the sword” (vv. 34, 37). Acts gives us clear examples of both: James and Peter. Are we to conclude that James was not walking by faith? No way.

Stepping out by faith means we are committed to God and are willing to trust Him whatever happens in the path of obedience. It doesn’t mean we can claim miracles when we act foolishly. We trust God to care for us according to His plan and purposes. We don’t set or force the agenda; we follow and submit to God’s agenda.

Conclusion: Root Issues—does God have first place?

Using God's Word in Spiritual Battle

Matthew 4:8-10

Introduction:

1. 1 John 2:6 says, "the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." That last part of the verse could be paraphrased like this, "should live their lives as Jesus Christ did." Matthew 4:1-11 provides an excellent opportunity to see how the Lord handled temptation so that we can learn to live like He did.
2. Testing is under God's control. It doesn't mean that God is displeased with us. It is designed to reveal what's in our hearts.
3. The first test that the Lord was faced forced a choice between food or His Father. Would He act independently or submissively? The timeless, universal principle is that *it is sinful to pursue gratification or satisfaction apart from or contrary to God's will*. The Lord's answer, in v. 4, reminds us that bread may sustain physical life, but that's not the only kind of life or even the most important kind of life! What we really need is what comes from God because God alone can truly satisfy the deepest needs we have.
4. The second test was pitted trusting God against testing God. God can be completely trusted as we follow His will, but demanding that God prove Himself is sinful. We put God to the test when we misuse the Scriptures to claim something God never promised (like the devil did in v. 6). We put God to the test when we act irresponsibly, then expect God to bail us out miraculously. We put God to the test when we rashly pursue our id
5. This morning will we look at the third test and then examine some very important principles about how to use God's Word in spiritual warfare.

II. The Third Test:

The third test probably involves some kind of visionary experience in which the devil shows Jesus the kingdoms of the world and makes an offer to Jesus with one condition: bow down and worship Satan. The point of sin here is very obvious.

Before we look at the sin more carefully, there's a question that we need to consider, "Can the devil really deliver on this promise?" Can he really give Jesus the kingdoms of the world? Luke's account expands on the devil's claim with these words, "for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish" (Luke 4:6). Not surprisingly, there is some debate about Satan's claim here. On one hand, it is clear that Satan is described as the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; cf. 2 Cor 4:4) and as exercising powerful control over those who live in it (Eph 2:1-3; 2 Cor 4:4). On the other hand, the Bible is also clear that God rules over all things, and that "For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God" (Rom 13:1; cf. Ps 75:7).

So, I believe it is best to answer the question like this: (1) ultimately, no, Satan cannot give the full and final kingdoms of this world to Jesus because only the Father can do that; but (2) temporarily, during the time where the fall exercises its full effects, yes, Satan could move among sinful men to install his chosen ruler. This will happen with the Antichrist. A key here is to remember what Luke records, "it has been handed over to me." Satan's power in this world is under God's power and is the result of man's rebellion against God—this world has a ruler that fits it. The kingdoms, therefore, that Satan offers will not stand forever; they will fall under God's judgment.

Certainly Jesus knew that Satan was not the true God, so how could there being any real power to this test? We need to think more precisely about what's at stake here. Jesus knew that He was come to be the King and the Father would give Him the kingdoms of this world, so what really is the appeal in Satan's offer? It is that the kingdoms can be received without the path that the Father has for the Son—a path of trial, suffering, and death. What Satan is offering is a shortcut to glory.

And the strength of any temptation is that it offers deceitful promises—Satan always promises more than he can deliver and always charges more than he claims! In that sense, this temptation is just like what you and I face any time we are tempted to take shortcuts on God's path of obedience. Also, the root of what's happening here is that

Jesus is being asked to compromise with God's enemy. It is a test of loyalty and faithfulness to God above everyone and everything else.

III. Wielding God's Word in Spiritual Warfare

a. You Must Know the Word before You Can Wield It!

It might be easy to miss this very basic principle, but we can't afford to miss it. If you plan to use God's Word in spiritual battle, then you must know it. A soldier can fire a gun that he left back in the barracks! Jesus demonstrates His knowledge of the Scriptures by immediately being able to refer to what it says in the face of each test. Each time Satan tests Him, Jesus quotes from the book of Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:16; 6:13).

We might be inclined to write this off to His deity, but that would be a mistake. Yes, He is God, but part of His submission during the incarnation involved genuine humanity, including the growth and development of His knowledge and wisdom. The gospel of Luke describes Jesus, while a child, as "increasing in wisdom" (2:40, 53). The Lord's answers to the devil came from a life that gave the kind of attention to God's Word that we see when Jesus, as a 12 year old, went to the Temple area to listen to the teachers and ask them questions (Luke 2:46).

What we see in the wilderness is the overflow of a mind and heart that truly embraced what the OT taught about spiritual growth and protection. Psalms 119:9-11 says, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word. ¹⁰With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments. ¹¹Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You."

What does it mean to "treasure" God's Word in our hearts? It means that we meditate on and delight in the Word. "I will meditate on Your precepts And regard Your ways" (Psalms 119:15). The blessed man delights "in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night" (Ps 1:2). Clearly, Jesus understood what the Psalms said about the godly man, and He hid God's Word in His heart from the time He was young. In the day of battle, He was fully ready because He had prepared His weapons for the fight.

If we are serious about fighting the battle against temptation and sin, then we must be serious about knowing God's Word. We need to maintain a regular, systematic, disciplined plan for reading what God has said to us—you can't recall things you have never read! Don't just scan the page so you can mark off your reading chart. Dig into it so that it digs into you. Hiding God's Word in your heart means that you will have to spend time meditating on it, mulling it over in your mind, talking to yourself about what it says and how it applies to your life.

Here's a basic principle in spiritual warfare that every one of us can apply. Don't make excuses about not having time to read God's Word—it doesn't take that much and there are plenty of things that you do that are less important! If you can't read, then get an audio recording of the Bible and listen to someone read it. Jot down some portion of God's Word and meditate on that throughout the day. If you don't discipline yourself to hide God's Word in your heart, it shouldn't be a surprise when you don't have the spiritual discipline to say no to temptation.

b. You Must Understand the Word to Wield It Properly!

This principle is seen most clearly in the devil's misuse of Scripture. He took God's inspired Word and perverted its proper use into a spiritual test. His misuse of the Bible is really a misinterpretation of it—it did not mean what he claimed that it meant. As you know, the Bible is often abused in this way, even by people who love it. Rather than submit their minds to its instruction, they make the Bible say what they want it to say. This is doubly dangerous—it leads to false steps and it robs us of our true source of wisdom and strength.

We can't cover this ground completely, but let me just remind us of three crucial truths about understanding God's Word:

- i. The text means what it says (grammatical).
 1. The meaning of words (semantics). If we want to understand a text of Scripture, then we have to understand the words that are used.

2. The arrangement of words (syntax). If we want to understand the meaning of a text, then we have to understand the proposition that it is making by seeing the relationships between the words (subject, verb, object).
- ii. The text cannot mean what it never meant (historical). If we want to understand the text correctly, then we need to understand it the way the author intended it and the original readers would have understood.
- iii. The text cannot mean something which contradicts other clear Scripture (theological).

You might object that you are not a Bible scholar, but that's not the point. You read the newspaper to understand it. You take great care when you read your insurance coverage or sign contracts. Treat the Bible as if it is at least as serious as these things!

c. You Must Use the Word the Way God Intended it to be Used!

The first thing we have to do here is correct a serious misunderstanding of how the Bible works in spiritual warfare. It is not a magic charm or like a clove of garlic that will keep spiritual vampires away from us. It is shameful that many believers treat the Bible like this—it really is the result of superstition, not biblical teaching. We can't sprinkle Bible verses on a temptation like some kind of holy water and expect it to drive away the evil spirits or ward off the temptation. This text makes that abundantly clear in two ways: (1) Jesus quotes Scripture to the devil and he doesn't run off and hide; and, (2) the devil himself quotes Scripture so it must not scare him to hear it!

So how does the Bible work in spiritual battle? Let me summarize in two words: perspective and power.

1. Spiritual Perspective: It exposes sin's nature and it expresses God's will; therefore, we use the Scripture to make a judgment. This what Jesus does in each case. He is presented with a test and He evaluates that test in light of the Scriptures. That leads Him to the conclusion that doing what He is being asked to do would be sinful. He sees the true nature of the test and the proper response because He looks at it from God's perspective.
2. Spiritual Power: it teaches us truth about God and gives us promises from God. When we learn about God, it causes us to love Him more than sin. When we receive God's promises, it causes us to trust Him more than sin.

Faith---love---obey
Faith---hope---endure

A Light Shines in the Darkness

Matthew 4:12-25

Introduction:

1. The opening chapters of Matthew's gospel lay the groundwork for the entire book by establishing foundational truths that will be developed in the rest of the book. Basic questions like: "Whose son is Jesus?" "Why was Jesus from Nazareth (not Bethlehem)?" "What's the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus?"
2. The record of Jesus' baptism and victory in the wilderness bring us to the end of the introduction—He has been recognized as God's Son and has proved Himself a faithful Son in the face of intense testing.
3. In the opening messages of this study, I made the case that the theme of Matthew can be summarized with these words, "Jesus Christ, the Messiah promised in the OT, was rejected by Israel, so His kingdom has been postponed until after His disciples have fulfilled the Great Commission."
4. In the second half of chapter four, Matthew stresses three key components of this theme: OT prophecy, disciples, and the kingdom.

I. Prophecy, vv. 12-17

A. Providential Direction, vv. 12-13

- We know from John's gospel that Jesus had been down in Judea prior to John's imprisonment, but now withdraws from there into Galilee. This is still within the region controlled by Herod, but it is away from the central influence of the leaders in Jerusalem. John 4:1-3 seems to indicate that this move was partially made because of the attention from the Pharisees that His ministry was drawing.
- It is interesting to note that contrary to the devil's temptation to put Himself in harm's way, the Lord acted quite deliberately to avoid confrontation before the appointed time.
- Just as God did via the census that resulted in Joseph and Mary returning to Bethlehem, He uses the circumstance of John's imprisonment to move Jesus up into Galilee.

B. Prophetic Fulfillment, vv. 14-16

- The prophecy here is from Isaiah 9:1-2. It came at the time of Assyrian oppression and focused on God's work to bring light in that darkness. That region, historically tied to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, had long had a significant Gentile presence—at times it was the dominant one.
- By pointing to this prophecy, Matthew continues to establish the Lord's Messianic character, but he also continues his emphasis upon the Gentiles.

C. Preaching Ministry, v. 17

- Matthew records Jesus as picking up the same message that John the Baptist had been preaching (3:2)—a call to repentance because of the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
- The kingdom to which Jesus refers is the one promised in the OT. The fact that it is "at hand" is because He is the King who has come to offer them the kingdom. This text sets the agenda for the book up until 16:21 where Matthew again uses the words "From that time Jesus began to."

II. Discipleship, vv. 18-22

A. The Preparation for the Call, cf. John 1:40-42; Luke 5:1-10

- One of the difficult issues of studying the gospels is figuring out the chronology of its events. In many ways, each gospel writer focuses on his own timeline and isn't really concerned about tying it into what is written in the other gospels.
- Taking the big picture of the gospels into account shows that there are probably three distinct stages through which some of the original disciples passed. John 1:40-42 shows the initiation phase for Peter and Andrew (and possibly John). Following this, Peter and Andrew must have returned to their livelihood as fishermen.
- Luke 5:1-10 sheds a little more light on the call that is recorded here in Matthew.

B. The Purpose of the Call, "I will make you fishers of men"

- I believe, given the material in John's gospel, that the call recorded in this passage is what we would call a "call to the ministry" and not a call to faith in Jesus Christ. They had come to see that Jesus was the Messiah before this, but now the Messiah is calling them to join Him in His ministry.
- Since they were fishermen, Jesus employs that imagery to make His call to them—no longer will they be normal fishermen, they will fish for men. We should not make too much out of the image because it is simply the concept of calling people to trust in Jesus that is intended.
- They had been casting a net into the sea, not they would, figuratively speaking, be casting the net of the gospel out into the sea of people. The figure does emphasize the importance of evangelism for the disciples of Jesus Christ.

C. The Pattern of the Call, "immediately they...followed Him"

- When the Master calls, His disciples listen. Peter, Andrew, James, and John understood Who He was, so they immediately heeded His call to join Him. No hesitation, just obedience. Peter will describe his response with these words later in this book, "we have left everything and followed you" (19:27). By mentioning their father, Matthew makes it clear that James and John are called to put Jesus ahead of family. This is a pattern of discipleship that Jesus demands of all His followers, cf. Matt 10:37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."
- In passing I think it would be good to point out that at least James and John should not be viewed as poor—according to Mark 1:20 there were hired men working in the boats with them.

III. Kingdom, vv. 23-25

A. Ministry, vv. 23-24

1. Word, "teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom"

- The region of Galilee was about twice the size of Wayne County in terms of square miles, and it had about 200 villages that numbers at least 15K per village. A conservative estimate is something less than 3 million people lived within it. So these words record an extensive, itinerant preaching ministry, all of it being covered on foot.
- We sometimes overlook the significance of preaching in the ministry of Jesus Christ, but it was the central work in which He engaged Himself. Consider His words in Mark 1:38, "He said to them, 'Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for.'" This came following a powerful manifestation of miraculous power that touched multitudes and draw many more to seek His miracle working power.
- Hebrews 1:1-2 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ²in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

- John 17:6-8 “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. ⁷Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; ⁸for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me.”

2. Works, “healing every kind of disease...”

- Miracles, particularly over demonic power, were the confirming evidence that the kingdom had come upon the people of Israel, cf. 12:28.
- When John the Baptist wonders if Jesus is the Expected One, the Lord answers by pointing out the miracles that have been performed—blind see, lame walk, lepers are cleansed, deaf hear, and the dead are raised (11:5).
- God’s kingdom will overturn the effects of the fall that have come upon man as a result of sin, and the Lord’s miracles are the proof of this. They were not just some kind of gimmick to draw attention (spiritual power team!). They were the demonstration of the Lord’s rule over creation and authority over Satan.

B. Popularity, v. 25

The Master Teacher's Masterpiece Matthew 5:1-2; 7:28-29

Introduction:

1. The Sermon on the Mount is very familiar and popularity, containing famous passages of Scripture like the beatitudes, the Lord's prayer, and well-known statements about being the "salt of the earth," plucking out one's eye, not judging, casting pearls before swine, and building your house upon a rock. Consider how the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* opens its entry on the Sermon:
No other short section of the Bible has been more prominent in theological discussion and in the general life of the church. Even in our modern secular societies the Sermon's influence continues. Though they may have given the matter little careful thought, many men and women who have little or no contact with the church believe that the Sermon contains clear ethical teaching for all people of good will (p. 735).
2. But the Sermon is also a point of much interpretive debate. To whom does this sermon apply (Israel or the church; believers or unbelievers)? Should it be understood literally (really pluck out one's eye or turn the other cheek)? How do we fit what it teaches with the OT (is Jesus correcting it?) and with the later NT (does Paul violate what Jesus says about oaths or calling people fools?)? Does Jesus teach salvation by works (be perfect!)?
3. We will work through many of these questions as we study the text of this Sermon, but I believe it will be helpful to handle some general introductory issues at the start so that we have the right perspective as we make our way through this wonderful sermon.

I. Is It a Single Sermon?

The issue here is that portions of what is taught as a unit in this Sermon are recorded in the other gospels in other settings, so some have argued that Matthew built a sermon from a collection of Jesus' teachings. But the way that Matthew begins and ends the sermon make it difficult to argue like this without calling into question the integrity of Matthew's record.

Some also try to make a big deal out of the fact that Luke 6:17, in the KJV, has the same basic message as being delivered "in a plain" (hence the Sermon on the Plain). But the translation can simply and properly be "on a level place" and would still be located in the hills where Jesus was located.

II. To Whom was It Addressed?

A. To the Disciples, 5:1-2

Much of the content of the sermon presupposes a relationship with God: "You are the salt of the earth...light of the world" (5:13-14); "your Father who is in heaven" (5:16; cf. 5:48; 6:1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 14-15, 18, 32; 7:11); and "because of Me" (5:11).

B. To the Crowds, 7:28

The text is also very clear that the crowds heard this teaching (7:28) and there are also statements in the sermon which imply or suggest that Jesus was addressing unbelievers too, 5:20, 29-30; 6:24; 7:13-14, 21-23, 24-27.

Misunderstanding the dynamic here is one of the reasons, I believe, that the Sermon has posed problems for some interpreters. By assuming either that Jesus could not speak to both groups at the same time or that He could not give warnings like these to His disciples, they draw false conclusions about the purpose of the sermon. If the conclusion is drawn that the Sermon teaches that salvation is based on obedience, then: (1) some, mainly Lutheran, treat the sermon as preaching Law before the Gospel is preached; (2) some, mainly older dispensationalists, view

the sermon as only applicable to the millennial kingdom; and (3) some, mainly liberals, actually take it as a works-based approach to salvation.

All of these are mistaken. The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is a work of God's grace that is initiated by Him and when it is, the heart and life are changed—a spiritual transformation happens. To use Paul's words, the believer is made into a new creation. To use words of Jesus recorded by the Apostle John, the believer is born again. We cannot re-create ourselves or give ourselves a new birth; only God can do this.

There is significant evidence within the sermon that presupposes this work of grace: (1) the descriptions of those who are blessed (e.g., poor in spirit, those who mourn, hunger and thirst for righteousness); (2) the identification of them as salt of the earth and light of the world indicates something has happened to them; (3) identifying God as their Father implies they have been adopted as children. If God has done this transforming work, it will be evident. That's why Jesus can describe what genuine disciples look like—it is what God has done.

From the hearer's perspective, however, we must see the value of how Jesus presents this. Crowds have begun to flock to Him because of His teaching and miracles, and crowds are always a mixed multitude. The seriousness of the Lord's kingdom message must be understood if someone is to become a genuine disciple. The consequences of failing to genuinely heed the message are eternal (cf. 5:22, 29-30; 7:23, 27).

III. What is the Purpose of the Sermon?

It is to announce the nature of true repentance and the true righteousness which marks the kingdom which Jesus is proclaiming. By doing this, Jesus establishes His authority as the King. By recording this, Matthew begins to path toward the King's rejection.

A Heart for God's Kingdom I

Matthew 5:3-10

1. The Kingdom of Heaven is a huge concept for the Gospel of Matthew. In the first major section of teaching of Jesus that Matthew records, it is not surprising, therefore, to find the Kingdom at the center of His message. John the Baptist and the Lord both boldly and clearly told the people of Israel to repent because the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand (3:2; 4:17).
2. As I have mentioned previously, the exact nature of the Kingdom of Heaven has been the subject of much debate. Some suggest that it is a spiritual realm where God reigns over His people (the kingdom of God is in our hearts). I don't believe that this is accurate. It is true that God reigns over the kingdom, but I believe the Bible is clear that the *realm* over which God reigns is not simply our hearts. That it is a place seems abundantly clear: (1) "inherit the earth" (5:5); (2) "will enter...depart from Me" (7:21-23; cf. 6:20); (3) "enter into" vs. "throw out...into outer darkness" (25:21, 23, 30); (4) "come from the east and west, and recline...cast out into outer darkness" (8:11-12); (5) "will gather out of His kingdom" (13:41); (6) "in Your kingdom...may sit one on Your right and one on Your left" (20:21); and (7) "kingdom come" (6:10, cf. "on earth...heaven"). The Kingdom of Heaven is God's rule on this earth through King Jesus.
3. Tied to the debate about the nature of the Kingdom is the question of timing, i.e., when is the Kingdom established? Or, more specifically, is the Kingdom now, later, or some kind of combination? Those who define the Kingdom as a spiritual realm almost always say that the Kingdom is already here, even if only partially. It seems quite obvious that in the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus, the kingdom is presented as being near or at hand (3:2; 4:17; cf. 10:7). But it is equally clear that the kingdom is presented as something future: (1) it is something that will be entered at some future "day" (7:21-22; cf. 6:20); (2) it is a place where many "will come" to sit down with the patriarchs (8:11); and (3) will be the inheritance of God's people ("prepared for you" 25:34). The future element of the Kingdom is very clearly present in the opening of the Sermon on the Mount through the use of the future tense for most of the beatitudes.
4. The tension between the present and future is the result of the unique circumstances of the Lord's presence on earth. He was the promised Messiah who is going to fulfill all of the OT promises and had already begun to do so. He was the promised King and His presence meant that the Kingdom had in fact drawn near and was at hand.
5. If you think about what Jesus preaches in 4:17, the crucial question is not, "Is the Kingdom at hand?" That was clearly true—His teachings and miracles proved that. The crucial question really was, "Will Israel repent?" The King had come, but His kingdom would not be established unless it was accepted with genuine repentance (cf. 11:20).
6. If we are going to understand the Sermon on the Mount properly, we must understand this backdrop for it. The purpose of this sermon is to show the nature of true repentance and the true righteousness which marks the kingdom which Jesus is proclaiming (5:3, 20; 7:21). By doing this, Jesus establishes His authority as the King (7:29; cf. "because of Me" 6:11; "says to Me...I will declare" 7:21-23; "hears these words of Mine" 7:24, 26). And by recording this, Matthew begins to path toward the King's rejection.
7. We can better understand 5:20 by comparing it to 15:7-9 and 23:25-28. Jesus is not teaching them that the key to the kingdom of heaven is self-righteousness. The righteousness of the Pharisees is a false righteousness—it is external and done for show (cf. 6:1-18). The outside was clean, but the heart was not. They loved themselves more than they loved God. They wanted the approval of men more than they wanted the approval of God (John 12:43). They were self-centered, not God-centered.
8. The Sermon on the Mount is aimed at confronting the sin and self-righteousness of Israel. Without genuine repentance that confesses sin and spiritual poverty, they will not accept the King of Righteousness. For those Israelites who mistakenly viewed the Kingdom exclusively in secular, military, and political terms, the Sermon confronts them with the reality that God's kingdom will be truly righteous and that it's citizens must embrace that righteousness.

9. So, for the Lord's dual audience, the sermon has dual purposes: (1) for His disciples, it shows them what it means to follow Jesus Christ; and (2) for the crowds, it shows them the nature of genuine repentance and faith.

A Heart for God's Kingdom II

Matthew 5:3-10

10. We live in a day that talks a lot about *rights*, and sometimes the word *entitlement* is tied in to that discussion. Those who possess certain *rights* are *entitled* to certain privileges or opportunities. Of course, in some cases this is a completely proper point to make (as in human rights). In other cases, however, it is completely mistaken (as in a woman's right to choose or a right to work). In these latter cases, the root of such claims is really self-centeredness.
11. This idea of rights or entitlement was the spiritual backdrop of the Lord's ministry—the Jewish people, especially the religious leaders, believed that they had special rights by virtue of their ancestry and religious practices. In other words, they thought they were entitled to enter the Kingdom.
12. To the contrary, Jesus preaches that ancestry and religious performance provide no rights to the Kingdom. Genuine repentance is the condition for entrance.

I. The Portrait of the Lord's Disciples

A. They Recognize Their True Spiritual Condition, vv. 3-6

1. The "poor in spirit" are those who understand their desperate need and their own inability to meet it. The poor have no means by which to solve their problem without the help of some benefactor. Christ's disciples must sense their spiritual poverty so that they turn to the One who can help them.
2. Those who "mourn" are those who grieve over the corruption and consequences of sin in their lives and in the world around them. It has personal and social elements because sin does. If we truly see the horribleness of our sin, we will mourn and grieve over it. When we see the effects of that sin in this world, it should produce an ache in our souls. This is true whether it is spiritual (e.g., broken marriage vows) or physical (e.g., disease and death).
3. The "gentle" are those who are meek, lowly or humble; they don't exalt themselves or assert themselves to get what they want (Ps 37:11 "the humble will inherit the land"). Jesus uses this word to describe Himself in 11:29, so it doesn't mean that those who are "gentle" are weak. It means that they do not fight and claw to get what they want or what others have.
4. Those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness" have a consuming, intense longing for God's will to be fulfilled in their lives and the world around them (6:33; 7:21). Righteousness is conformity to the standard of God's character and will, and the Lord's disciples hunger for that.

B. They Reflect the Lord's Character, vv. 7-9

1. They are merciful. Recognizing their own need for mercy produces a heart that is merciful toward others—sympathy with their plight leads to compassion on them. "The one who is not merciful is inevitably so unaware of his own state that he thinks he needs no mercy. He cannot picture himself as miserable and wretched.... He is like the Pharisee in the temple who was unmerciful toward he wretched tax collector in the corner (Luke 18:10 ff.)" (Carson, p. 25).
2. They are pure in heart. Purity of heart means that their hearts are not divided, but are single in commitment to God and His will. We are inclined to think this is a matter of motives, but it probably has a much closer connection to ethics than it might seem at first, cf. 5:28; 15:17-20. A pure heart seeks God and His glory ahead of sin and selfish pleasure.
3. They are peacemakers. This word is only used here in the NT. God is the ultimate peacemaker by sending His Son into the world (Eph 2:14-15). Believers are to adopt this pattern (cf. Rom 14:19 "So then let us pursue the things which make for peace;" 12:18 "If possible, so far as it depends on you,

be at peace with all men;" Heb 12:14 "Pursue peace with all men;" 1 Ths 5:13 "Live in peace with one another").

C. They Remain Faithful to the Lord, v. 10

Genuine disciples do not wilt under the pressure of persecution; they remain faithful to the Lord (cf. 10:32-33; 13:21). The text is clear that this persecution is not the just desserts of evil behavior. It comes because of "righteousness" (cf. "of Me" in v. 11).

II. The Promises to the Lord's Disciples

A. They Receive God's Approval, "blessed"

B. They Receive God's Grace, "shall be comforted...inherit...be satisfied..."

C. They Enter God's Presence, "theirs is the kingdom...see God...sons of God"

Conclusion:

1. It is crucial to understand what Jesus is doing here. He is laying out the signs of life for those who are citizens of the kingdom.
2. If you are Christ's disciple, then this is what you should look and live like. If these things are absent, then you need to repent and turn to Christ.

Rejoicing in Persecution

Matthew 5:11-12

I. The Reality of Persecution, “insult...persecute...falsely say”

Jesus implies that His disciples will face both *insult* and *injury* for following Him. The disciples' loyalty to Jesus and lives that follow Jesus will provoke the anger of the Lord's enemies. The range of opposition will run from verbal attacks to violence against them. It is important to note the word *falsely* in this verse—the opposition which the disciples face is not justified. The Apostle Peter makes this point clearly in 1 Peter 4:15-16, “Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; ¹⁶but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.”

Matthew 10:24 ff contains direct teaching from the Lord that not only warns about the coming persecution, but illustrates it too. Verse 25 says that the Lord's enemies “called the head of the house Beelzebul” so “how much more will the malign the members of his household!” Then He proceeds to warn about those who can kill the body, implying that these disciples may face death for following Jesus Christ.

Persecution separates the wheat from the chaff among those who profess to be Christ's disciples (Matt 13:21). It divides between those who come to Christ for purely selfish, temporal reasons and those who come to Christ because they have recognized who He is and what He really offers. Genuine faith is prepared to pass through the fire of persecution, and the faith that bails out is a false faith.

II. The Reason for Persecution, “of Me”

The last words of v. 11 are important. The persecution that the disciples face is not the self-inflicted wound of sin and ignorance; it is because of their commitment to Jesus Christ. Jesus says it is “because of Me.” Or, in the words of v. 10, it is “for the sake of righteousness” (i.e., doing God's will, which includes faith in and following Jesus Christ). Again, Peter offers good commentary on this in 1 Peter 4:14, “If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”

Genuine believers should never run from persecution for Christ's sake, but they also don't walk around looking for a fight! I don't believe the Bible offers any comfort to people who engage in behavior that gets them insulted or injured due to their own obnoxiousness or pugnaciousness. God's people must stand firm for the truth and remain faithful to Jesus Christ, but I don't see any warrant in Scripture for provoking the fight. In fact, we are commanded to pray that we may live a “tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (1 Tim 2:2). This is especially important for us to remember in a culture that often confuses civic responsibilities and opportunities with Christian ones.

III. The Response to Persecution, “Rejoice and be glad”

A. Our Responsibility, “Rejoice and be glad”

What kind of incredible instruction is this? Rejoice when men persecute you? Be exceeding glad when men revile you and speak evil of you falsely? This is not *normal* human behavior! World history is littered with the tragic accounts of the alternating persecutions as religious groups move in and out of power. But Jesus tells His followers to respond to persecution with an entirely different attitude—don't retaliate; rejoice!

This note is a very important one for our day to hear. We have become a world of whiners! The culture around us has bought the victimization mindset that focuses on the hurts we feel more than the ones we have delivered. The net result is to think that people who are hurt can't really respond properly precisely because they are hurting. That's not biblical and it's not healthy.

B. The Reasons, “for your reward...for so they persecuted”

On what basis does Jesus teach that His disciples should rejoice and be glad in the face of such unfriendly circumstances? The answer to that question is contrary to much of our contemporary thinking about right motives for ministry and Christian living. Jesus tells His disciples to "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: *for great is your reward in heaven.*" The Lord anchors the motivation for a right response to persecution in the prospect of eternal reward. They should be happy because their present persecution is preparing a large eternal benefit for them.

But the motive that Jesus supplies is in our day treated with great suspicion. The thought of obtaining eternal reward is considered a sub-Christian motivation. We ought to do what's right simply and solely because it is right, not because it has any personal benefits attached to it. Even our hymnals pit reward against true service. We earnestly sing, "Do then the best you can, Not for reward, Not for the praise of men, But for the Lord" as if to serve for eternal reward is somehow contrary to serving the Lord properly. At least on the surface, these words of Jesus seem to conflict with much of what we hear taught today as the proper motivation for ministry.

It is the purpose of this article to show that the conflict is not merely on the surface, but that it cuts right to the core of Christian motivation. Contrary to current teaching, Jesus Christ, and the apostles after Him, taught that eternal reward *ought* to be, not just *is*, a powerful motive for proper Christian living.

Is this principle taught anywhere else?

Some might argue that these verses are unique, that they apply to a special circumstance or situation, and do not form a solid basis for Christian motivation. But there are plenty of other places where Jesus taught the very same truth. In Matthew 6:19-20, He teaches that the disciples ought to lay up treasure for themselves in heaven. Too often His teaching is misunderstood by suggesting that the problem in verse 19 is found in the words "for yourselves." Bible teachers and commentators often suggest that these words evidence the selfish nature of the action. The problem with this interpretation is obvious: verse 20 uses the same words and construction to tell us what we are supposed to do. Christ's positive command is "lay up for yourselves." Jesus is not rebuking them for laying up treasure for themselves; He is showing them the foolishness of laying up treasures for themselves which will not last! The focus of the verses is on the location of the treasure, not on the phrase *for yourselves*.

We should not be surprised at this at all. In verses 1-18, Jesus has been warning them about the short-sightedness of practicing their righteousness so as to be seen by people. It is a short-sighted motive precisely because its reward is limited in value and extent. If you give, pray, or fast in order to be seen by men, then you have received your full reward (vv 2, 5, 16). Instead, our motive should be to be seen by our Father in heaven because He will reward (vv 3, 6, 18). Jesus is absolutely clear: do not give up the Father's reward by seeking to gain man's reward (v 1). The practice of righteousness should be motivated by the promise of eternal reward. Many other Gospel texts confirm this principle, e.g., Matt 19:28-29; Luke 6:35; 14:12-14.

Our Lord was not alone in teaching this truth. The Apostles rooted biblical living in the promise of eternal reward. For example, Paul taught that this should motivate servants to obey their masters (Eph 6:8), rich people to use their money wisely (1 Tim 6:17-19), and all of God's people to be willing to help those in economic trouble (Acts 20:35). He was personally motivated by the reality that this "light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor 4:16). The writer of Hebrews reminded his readers that God would not forget their work and labor shown toward His name (6:10) and of their earlier confidence that sacrificing this world's goods was not to be regretted because they anticipated "a better and an enduring substance" (10:34). Therefore, he exhorts them not to let go of this confidence "which hath great recompence of reward" (10:35).

Isn't it selfish to be motivated by reward?

Many people argue that the highest motive for any deed is free from any thought of self-benefit. Any personal self-interest that mixes into the act dilutes the purity of the motive. According to this view, any desire for self-benefit taints the action with a degree of selfishness. In other words, if I do it because there is something to be gained by me, then it is not the highest kind of motivation. The highest motive is one which leads me to do something solely or purely because it is the right thing to do. This message is sounded so often that it sounds applaudable and right. Unfortunately, it is out of step with Scripture at three points.

First, the Bible clearly appeals to people's sense of self-interest. At many points it offers salvation on the basis of the benefits of accepting; e.g., "come unto me ... and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28). Likewise, it warns of judgment in

a manner which appeals to the self-interest of mankind; e.g., "fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28). **Second**, Jesus set an example for us of seeking the prospect of eternal, lasting benefit. The writer of Hebrews exhorts his readers to look unto Jesus "who *for the joy* that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb 12:2). The very pattern that we are to imitate demands that we be motivated by a joy set before us. **Third**, according to this view, the highest moral act is actually the one done with a motive of disinterest; but the Scriptures tell us that we are to rejoice in doing righteousness (Isa 64:5). It is impossible to rejoice in and be disinterested about something at the same time!

How can seeking eternal reward be God's will?

Does God actually desire for us to seek after eternal reward? Yes! Jesus commanded us to lay up treasures in heaven (Matt 6:20) and to give to those who cannot repay because then "thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:14). Paul told the Ephesian elders to support the weak because Jesus had taught that "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). The motive for giving to those in need was the promise of God's blessing! The question we need to answer then is, "What is right about seeking eternal reward?"

First, to seek after heavenly reward is actually an evidence of love for God. Jesus said that "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt 6:21). That is why it is impossible to serve God and mammon—a person will either "hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other" (Matt 6:24). It is impossible to truly love God and not put the pursuit of heavenly treasure ahead of earthly things. The Apostle John even goes so far as to warn us that loving the world means that you do not love the Father (1 John 2:15). Living for eternal reward demonstrates that you place more value on God and His gifts than on anything this world can offer. It is the demonstration that you have a heart that yearns for heaven!

Second, to seek diligently after eternal reward is an act of faith. Hebrews 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Notice the second part of that verse! What type of faith pleases God? Faith that believes that He is a God who rewards those who seek Him! Seeking eternal reward is an act of faith which is pleasing to God. In fact, it is impossible to please Him if we do not have faith enough to seek His reward! Hebrews 11 is a collection of men and women who had faith in God's promise of future reward: Abraham and the patriarchs sojourned looking for a heavenly country (vv 13-16); Moses left Pharaoh's house because he had "respect unto the recompence of the reward" (v 26); others were tortured and martyred in faithful expectation of a "better resurrection" (v 35).

The idea that seeking eternal reward is wrong clearly contradicts the Scriptures. God created us with a thirst which only He can satisfy, and biblical love and faith drive us to seek to quench that thirst exclusively and fully in the wonder of His glory. The words of David still stand true: "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Ps 16:11). The passing pleasures of sin and the decaying riches of this world are nothing to be compared with the reward of God. Seeking that reward reveals our love (what we value most) and faith (what we truly believe).

Discipleship on Display

Matthew 5:13-16

The images, salt and light, that the Lord uses in these verses are very familiar and have become part of the language of English speakers. *Salt of the earth* is used to describe “People who are salt of the earth are decent, dependable and unpretentious.” Everyone knows that you must let your light shine. I would like to suggest that the images are simply that, images, and that the real point of this passage is not to teach us how to be like salt or light. That is, we aren’t supposed to read these verses and ask, “How does a believer be salt in the earth and light in the world?” The text tells us that Christ’s disciples already are salt and light, not that they should become it.

The problem that develops when we ask the wrong question is that we start to turn away from the text. Watch what happens: (1) How does a believer be salt? (2) What does salt do? (3) How can we do that? There is no clear answer to that second question—is salt it a symbol for purity, flavor/blessing, thirst creator, something that stings, preservative? Because the answer to that question is unclear, the answers to the third question can be radically different.

But I don’t believe Jesus wants us to guess about what He wants us to do. In fact, he makes it very clear what He wants us to do. The images prepare us for His command by illustrating the reasons we should do what He wants us to do. Verse 16 is very clear about His will: engage in good works. What He says before that shows us that genuine believers will be active in good works; their discipleship will be on display for all to see.

His point about the salt is simply that if it loses its saltiness, then it is good for nothing. Jesus warns against the salt losing its saltiness. Some have argued against this because in one sense it is quite impossible, sodium chloride is a stable compound and therefore cannot lose its saltiness. However, the salt of Christ’s day was often gathered from salt marshes and was mingled with many impurities. The actual salt, being more soluble than the impurities would be leached out and the residue would be of little worth. It was then thrown out on the road or into the garbage.

He makes a similar point with two statements about the light: (1) a city on a hill can’t be hid, and (2) people don’t light a lamp to put it under a basket. These are simple statements which make it plain that the purpose of light is to shine, not be obscured. Jesus is saying that His disciples are to be on display like cities on the hill or lights on a lampstand.

So what maintains saltiness and keeps the light shining? The answer is in verse 16.

I. The Action, *let your light shine...your good works*

The light shining is explained in the phrase *your good works*. What are good works? **First**, quite obviously, they do not include any acts of disobedience to God’s will—these would be called evil works/deeds. **Second**, they can not be limited to a particular type of activity, e.g., soulwinning, giving. **Third**, they are good because they conform to God’s character and will. The Bible says much about the place of good works/deeds in the life of God’s child: Gal 6:9-10; Eph 2:10; Titus 1:16; 2:7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14.

So, a crucial question becomes, “What is a good deed?” What ought to be a simple question has become complicated by the tendency in liberal circles to elevate social concerns above the gospel and the necessary reaction of Bible believers against this. But, as is often the case in reactions, the common tendency among Bible believers to reject benevolence and good deeds goes beyond what the Bible actually teaches. Let’s take some time to understand this important concept biblically and practically.

The immediate context provides insight into the meaning of “good deeds” through the command to Titus that is then paralleled with the responsibility of all believers, cf. vv. 13-14. V. 13 says that these men should be diligently helped “so that nothing is lacking for them.” Based on that (“also”), Paul urges Titus to challenge the Cretans to engage in “good deeds to meet pressing needs.” The NIV completely misses the point with its translation here (“Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives”). The point is not that you do good in order to take care of your own needs, but that you engage in meeting the needs of others (cf. 3:1, 8, 13).

So, a “good deed” appears to be an act of benevolence on behalf of someone in need. This is confirmed by other texts as well.

- Prov 19:17 One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, and He will repay him for his good deed.
- Acts 9:36 Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did.
- 2 Cor 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;
- 1 Tim 6:18 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,
- Acts 20:35 "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

This is not to say that good deeds are limited to giving money or resources to people. Not at all. A good deed is any benevolent act designed to meet someone's needs. The works of Jesus were described as good works; the office of bishop is called a good work. 1 Timothy 2:10 and 5:10 mark off good works as a vital ingredient of godliness in women.

Good works extend the continuum from simple acts of kindness extended to those in need (Titus 3:14; Gal 6:10; Rom 12:13) to radical acts of righteousness and rejection of the world's values (Acts 4:36-37; 2 Cor 8; Heb 10:32ff).

TRANSITION: We are all, every last believer, called to a mission of good works, but why? The answer comes in v 16.

II. The Aim, *glorify your Father who is in heaven*

We strive for good works so that God's glory is made known! Matthew records examples of this in 9:8 and 15:31. Peter challenged his readers with the same aim, cf. 1 Pet 2:12. The good deeds which Jesus calls us to do are not acts of merit, but worship! They are not intended to earn God's favor, but to proclaim His glory! The goal of good works/deeds is the glory of God.

But that raises an important question: How do good works done by us result in God receiving glory?

1. They reveal a true knowledge of God, cf. Matt 5:43-45; Titus 1:16, 1 Jn 3:10.
2. They reveal an eternal, heavenly focus rather than a temporal, worldly focus for life, 1 Tim 6:18; Luke 6:35 *But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.*
3. They are rooted in faith and hope, i.e., they are good deeds done through belief in God's promises and faith/hope bring honor God!
 - a. It says clearly that I trust God more than my wisdom, cf Rom 4:20 *yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God.*
 - b. It says clearly that I value God more than my world, Acts 20:35, *In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Cf. Heb 6:9-10; 10:32-34.*

Do you recognize the liberating power of this principle? We are set free from the normal quests and pursuits of mankind. We do not have to chase after things which can never be caught (peace, security, enough pleasure and possessions) and live under the fear of things which are unavoidable (disease, rejection, death)! We are freed to pursue something larger—God's glory. And because we are freed to do it, we can do it in ways which are completely opposite from the world's pursuits.

- Instead of grabbing for more and more money and materials, we can freely give it away to meet needs and advance God's work!
- Instead of orienting our entire lives around the pursuit of recreation, we can gladly schedule our lives around service to God.

- Instead of zealously guarding ourselves from work and weariness, we can give ourselves to toil for Christ's sake.
- Instead of running from suffering, hardship, and the threat of death, we can take the cup which the Lord hands us knowing full well that it will accomplish His glory and our good.

TRANSITION: Yet, there is one more truth in this text which we must not neglect. The Savior has already instructed us about what we are to do (good works), why we are to do them (to glorify your Father), and now He points our attention to where we should do them.

III. The Arena, *before men*

Contrary to what we might normally conclude, Jesus indicates that the arena for our good works is *before men*. This is only logical: how can people glorify the Father on the basis of our good works if they do not see them! In fact, *before them* probably the center of His point because verse 16 follows on the heels of instruction in 14-15 about the proper placement of a lamp—it must be exposed to be effective! Jesus is exhorting them and us to engage in **public** good deeds. They are not to be restricted to the secluded confines of the Christian circle. They are to be done in the flow of life amidst believers and unbelievers alike, cf. Gal 6:10, *So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.*

Obviously, we must guard our hearts so that we, in seeking to visibly serve God through good works, do not allow our motives to be seduced away to serving in order to be seen by men for their approval. The key is to remember the aim—we do what we do so that they think much of our God, not us.

What good have you done for your neighbors? fellow workers? Can others see in you a clear commitment to a radically different set of values and lifestyle?

The Lord and the Law

Matthew 5:17-20

Introduction:

1. Up to the point, the Sermon has focused on describing the citizens of the Kingdom, their character and influence.
2. Now the Lord moves to outline the righteousness of the Kingdom. This is what Jesus expects of His disciples, and it is presented in contrast to the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (v. 20, cf. 6:1 ff).
3. The Lord was stunningly unique in His life and teaching, so much so that it raised questions from both the followers of John the Baptist and the Pharisees. The first part of this next section seems to tackle directly the possibility of misunderstanding the Lord's view of the OT. Whether this is due to an actual or simply an anticipated misunderstanding is difficult to tell.

I. A Clarification of the Lord's Mission, vv. 17-18

I call it a clarification based on the words "Do not think..."

A. Jesus Did Not Come to Abolish the Law or Prophets, v. 17a

1. The combination of Law and Prophets means that Jesus is referring to the OT revelation. It was common to describe the OT Scriptures in this way (cf. 7:12). The Law refers to the Pentateuch, and the Prophets covered the rest (earlier and later).
2. Abolish means to pull down or destroy or annul. Jesus did not come to do away with the OT Scriptures.
3. The coming of Christ does not render the OT obsolete or irrelevant.

B. Jesus Came to Fulfill Them, v. 17b

1. The real mission was to fulfill the OT Scriptures. What does fulfill mean? (a) obey, keep them; (b) bring out the full meaning of them; (c) complete or fulfill in the sense that the OT points toward Him—He is their fulfillment.
2. (a) is weak in that the contrast is between "abolish" and "fulfill"; (b) tries to account for what happens in the rest of this section, but doesn't really capture what Jesus does here (e.g., sometimes tackling Rabbinic views, not the Law itself); (c) seems to best explain the context (immediate and Matthew's use of fulfill) and what is said in 11:13.
3. How, then, does Jesus fulfill the Law and Prophets? (a) He is the Messiah that was promised; (b) He provides the Redemption that was pictured and promised; and (c) He is the new Lawgiver prophesied, cf. Deut 18:18-19; Acts 3:22-23.
4. This statement has profound implications regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ, and it places Him as the One who can authoritatively communicate God's will. Since He is the fulfillment of the Law, He is the One who can properly interpret and apply it.

C. The OT Stands Until All is Accomplished, v. 18

1. The introductory words of v. 18 emphasize the truthfulness of the statements which follow. Someone has noted that the prophets said "Thus says the LORD" and the apostles said "It is written," but the Lord says, "I say to you."

2. The word “until” is used twice in this verse to establish a time reference for the principle that Jesus is teaching. The enduring validity and authority of the OT Scriptures (based on v. 17) is “until heaven and earth pass away” OR “all is accomplished.”
3. The phrase “heaven and earth pass away” is an idiom to speak of the end of creation. The physical creation will cease to exist before this happens.
4. To make His point about the authority of the Scriptures, Jesus uses picturesque language—“the smallest letter or stroke”—of that revelation. The well known words “jot or tittle” mean the small thing as NASB’s translation. It is close to the equivalent of the contemporary idiom which tells you to “dot your I’s and cross your T’s.”
5. The real terminal point that Jesus is focused on isn’t the heaven and earth passing away; it is the point where “all is accomplished.” The focus here is on fulfillment. Everything that the OT promised will be done.

II. The Obligation of the Disciples

The word “then” indicates that Jesus is drawing out the implication of the OT Scriptures authority for believers.

- A. Careful Obedience Affects Your Place in the Kingdom, “keeps and teaches”
 1. Disregard for God’s Will, “annuls one of the least... and teaches others”
 2. Commitment to God’s Will, “keeps and teaches”
- B. Genuine Righteousness Affects Your Entrance into the Kingdom, “righteousness surpasses”
 1. This is not a statement calling for more righteousness than the Pharisees, but that their righteousness is flawed because of its hypocrisy, self-love, and disregard for God’s righteousness.
 2. It does not locate the source of this righteousness in themselves or make their righteousness the basis for entrance. It says what other NT texts say, simply that without it you will not enter.

The Lord and the Law II

Matthew 5:17-20

Introduction:

4. Up to the point, the Sermon has focused on describing the citizens of the Kingdom, their character and influence.
5. Last week we scratched the surface of a major debate in biblical and doctrinal studies—the place of the Law in the life of the believer. Historically, the poles of this debate have been very hard on each other. Practically, the poles of this debate have failed miserably to honor God.
6. On one hand are those are the legalists, and the other is the libertine.

III. A Clarification of the Lord's Mission, vv. 17-18

I call it a clarification based on the words “Do not think...”

- A. Jesus Did Not Come to Abolish the Law or Prophets, v. 17a
- B. Jesus Came to Fulfill Them, v. 17b
- C. The OT Stands Until All is Accomplished, v. 18

IV. The Obligation of the Disciples

The word “then” indicates that Jesus is drawing out the implication of the OT Scriptures authority for believers.

- A. Careful Obedience Affects Your Place in the Kingdom, “keeps and teaches”
- B. Genuine Righteousness Affects Your Entrance into the Kingdom, “righteousness surpasses”

What are the implications of this for the NT believer?

2. Does what Jesus teaches here mean that we, as NT believers, are still obligated to keep the commands of the Law? (e.g., like 7th Day Adventists and others believe).
 - Clarification about Law vis-à-vis Mosaic Law: (a) there is a distinction to be made between the Pentateuch, OT, and the Mosaic Law (e.g., Gen 9:6); (b) to be out from under the Mosaic Law is not the same as being without law (cf. 1 Cor 9:21 “though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ”); (c) Jesus is placing Himself as the fulfillment of the Law and the One who takes the place of giving the new rule of life (cf. Matt 5:21 “But I say to you”).
 - Everyone recognizes that at least certain portions of the Mosaic Law have been fulfilled to such an extent that they are no longer the rule of life for believers. For instance, Hebrews is clear that the sacrifices have been done away with because of the sacrifice of Christ. This reality is what has led to the approach which divides the Mosaic Law into three categories: moral, civil, and ceremonial. This distinction, though, is not valid: (a) there’s no exegetical basis for it in either Old or New Testaments; (b) there’s significant evidence that the Law was treated as a unitary whole; and (c) there’s no workable solution for deciding what the continuing moral law is (Decalogue includes Sabbath marked out as the 7th day, not just one in seven).
 - Based on several NT passages, I believe it is best to see the purpose of Mosaic Law as having been fulfilled by Christ and therefore not directly applicable to NT believers. Galatians 3:23-25 teaches that the Law served a temporary function until Christ came. Romans 10:4 says that “Christ is the end of the law.” Ephesians 2:15 is clear that Jesus Christ abolished the divider between the Jews and Gentiles and identifies that as the Law.

- So, (1) Jesus is assuming the position of Teacher regarding what God expects for Kingdom citizens; (2) He is not re-establishing the Mosaic Law as the rule of life for believers in the church; (3) Since He is addressing Jews within a Kingdom context there is more continuity with the Mosaic Law than the NT epistles precisely because it is designed for the Kingdom offered to the Jews vs. for the global spread of the church (cf. 5:23-24); (4) This means we must be careful with the Sermon as we apply it, much like we need to be with the OT.
3. What “profitability” does the Law have for the NT believer?
- It is profitable, 2 Tim 3:16-17!
 - It reveals God’s character to us (cf. Lev 11:45 “For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy”). Some aspects of this revelation are direct (e.g., murder as an attack on God’s image) and others are indirect (e.g., distinctions between clean and unclean that were intended to teach a principle of separation).
 - It gives us examples and principles of moral conduct that help us apply NT commands. E.g., 1 Ths 4:3 says that God’s will is to abstain from fornication and the Law gives us loads of insight into what fits into that category of sin; the command to love your neighbor is given specificity when we see the parapet command in Deut 22:8 (“When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, so that you will not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone falls from it”).
4. It is crucial to remember that the Law could never give life and it could not supply the power which was necessary for keeping it. It couldn’t in the OT, and it can’t now. The only One who fulfilled all the Laws demands is Jesus Christ. Only through faith in Jesus Christ can the righteousness of Christ be credited to us (justification) and the Spirit of Christ come to dwell in us so that we can live in obedience to God (sanctification).

A Mouthful of Murder

Matthew 5:21-26

Introduction:

1. The next section involves a series of contrasts introduced with “you have heard...but I say to you.” Jesus is not contradicting the OT, but is addressing their misunderstandings about it and/or some wrong teaching about it that was contemporary. He is establishing His authority as the true teacher.
2. The general tone ties to v. 20. Specifically, Jesus seems to be confronting the tendency to externalize God’s demands.

I. The Principle, vv. 21-22

A. Explanation

1. Verse 21 is most likely a reference to the giving of the 10 commandments at Sinai (“the ancients were told”). *Murder* is a good translation here because not all killing was prohibited by the 6th commandment. Just war, capital punishment, and self-defense were all recognized exceptions to this law.
2. The phrase *liable to the court* is intended to sum up the whole process of being brought before the court, condemned, and sentenced. Unlawful killing was subject to the judgment of capital punishment. Ultimately, this is rooted in the sanctity of human life as made in God’s image (Gen 9:6).
3. In verse 22, Jesus drives the issue deeper into the human heart by declaring that unrighteous anger and contemptuous speech also will come under judgment. ***God’s concern goes much deeper than murder—unrighteous anger and contemptuous speech are violations of His will that bring judgment.***
4. Some have tried to argue that the three elements here represent an escalating scale of sin and judgment, but the case for this is not very strong (e.g., there’s little to no evidence that shows increasing depth of sin in moving from anger to fool). They represent three ways of stating the principle so that we don’t miss it.
 - a. The NASB phrase “good-for-nothing” translates a word that most versions simply leave untranslated, “Raca.” The reason they do not translate it is because the meaning is uncertain. What we can say for certain is that it wasn’t a flattering term! It probably has something to do with being empty, but we are exactly sure how the idiom works (cf. Bozo).
 - b. The concept of judgment is stated in three different ways: *before the court*, *before the supreme court*, and *into fiery hell*. All of these point back to the phrase “liable to the court” in v. 21. The basic point is that all of these attitudes and actions lead to condemnation. The fact that “fiery hell” is included makes us clearly aware that Jesus is not merely talking about civil trouble—this is God’s standard of judgment and God’s sentence on it. Jesus isn’t teaching government here; He’s declaring what righteousness and its opposite are.

B. Argumentation

1. How does what Jesus teaches here fit with what we find in the Gospels about Him being angry (Mark 3:5 “looking around at them with anger”; cf. cleansing of the Temple in Matt 21 and John 2) and even calling the Pharisees and scribes fools (Matt 23:17)?
2. The basic answer is that not all anger is sinful—there is a real difference between righteous and unrighteous anger. Ephesians 4:26 says, “BE ANGRY, AND YET DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger.” The Bible is clear that God can be angry with sin without ever sinning because His is a righteous indignation (Ps 7:11). We must remember that Jesus is God, so when He is angered by the self-righteousness of the Pharisees it is a holy reaction against their sin. Likewise, what Jesus

pronounces is the proper condemnation, so when He calls someone a fool, it is the same as the Bible calling someone a fool (cf. Ps 14:1).

3. Contextually, we also know that what Jesus is really addressing here is personal relationships: (a) murder (v. 21); (b) angry with your brother (v. 22); (c) says to his brother (v. 22); (d) your brother has something against you (v. 23). The Lord is not dealing with anger at unrighteousness or confronting those who have defied the Lord. He is talking about how we respond in personal relationships.

C. Application

1. How can we tell the difference between righteous and unrighteous anger?
 - a. The object of the anger or indignation (it ought only to be sin, etc.);
 - b. The motive for the anger (not personal or selfish);
 - c. The manner in which it is displayed (not in unbiblical or ungodly displays); and,
 - d. The purpose toward which the anger is aimed (is it righting a wrong or retaliation and revenge?).
2. Anger is energy that can be used to solve problems or create problems depending on its direction. Anger is sinful when it is out of control (Pro 25:28) or is not dealt with promptly and properly (Eph. 4:26,27).

II. Its Priority, vv. 23-26

The Lord provides two illustrations to drive home the truth that ***God's concern goes much deeper than murder—unrighteous anger and contemptuous speech are violations of His will that bring judgment.*** The illustrations, however, involve an interesting twist. They approach the subject from the vantage point of the sin having been committed already. And they focus on what the one who has sinned should do.

A. Deal with Your Sin before You Come to Worship, vv. 23-24

The illustration comes from the practice of worship in the Temple. The worshipper would come with his offering to present it there for sacrifice. The Lord words it so that the picture is striking—the worshipper has come with the offering and then remembers that he has sinned against someone (“your brother has something against you”). While the text leaves it very general, it is safe to say that at least the sins of v. 22 would be in mind. In other words, if a brother has been the object of your sinful anger or contemptuous speech, then go resolve the matter before you present your offering.

Our worship is empty and unacceptable to God if it does not come from a heart that is serious about our sin and God's holiness. We mock God if we treat sin lightly.

B. Deal with Your Sin before You Get to the Judge, vv. 25-26

The second illustration aims to emphasize the importance of dealing with our sin before it comes to the Judge. As soon as we realize that we have sinned, we should take steps to resolve it. If it comes to the court, we will face the consequences.

Conclusion:

1. The Second Great Commandment requires more than non-murder! If we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, then we cannot respond in sinful anger and contempt toward others.
2. The searching judgment of God upon our hearts and words should sober us!
3. God will not accept outward worship that ignores sin in the inner parts.
4. The time to deal with our sin is before judgment comes!

Dealing with Deadly Desires

Matthew 5:27-30

I. Principles

A. The Act of Adultery is Sin, v. 27.

1. It is a violation of God's will. Period.
2. It breaks the covenant and nature of marriage as an exclusive relationship in which two people have been made one.
3. This is so clear in Scripture that even remarriage after a wrongful divorce is considered adultery, cf. v. 32.

B. The Contemplation of Adultery is Sin, v. 28.

1. The language here addresses a look that is aimed at adultery, i.e., a look that includes sexual desire, perhaps even including the idea of trying to provoke that in the other person.
2. Jesus is not content to simply rule out the act of adultery, He rules out the imagination of it. This is because sin comes out of the heart—Matthew 15:19, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.”
3. The Bible is very clear about the path that sin takes. It starts with the thought then moves to the action. This is clear from the Garden forward—Samson, David, Judas.
4. Man's will generally follows his imagination.

C. The Battle with Sin Calls for Radical Amputation, vv. 29-30.

1. Hyperbolic language to drive home the seriousness of the point.
2. Right in both cases stresses the high price that you should be willing to pay.
3. Eye and hand are probably chosen because they represent the points of imagination and action.

II. Applications

A. Since the heart is the source of sin, we must guard it diligently! Cf. Pro 4:23 “Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.”

1. We cannot feed the heart wickedness and not have wickedness emerge. The heart feeds via the eyes, so we'd better be very careful about what our eyes take in. Block those channels. Check those videos. Filter that internet. Demand accountability.
2. We cannot be fooled into thinking that heart sin isn't as bad as acted sin. Both lead to hell!

B. If this kind of sin can happen in the heart, then genuine love for your neighbor refuses to put stumbling blocks in his or her pathway.

1. This is the backdrop for the biblical call to modesty. Any clothing that promotes or provokes sexual attention is immodest. That means that the safest route is to not draw attention to your body at all, but especially those parts which stir sexual desire. Believers must go 180 degrees from the direction the world promotes.

2. This is sufficient warrant for great caution in our relationships with the opposite sex—stirring up a longing for someone other than the spouse produces adultery in the heart. Flirting is, therefore, doubly wrong—what it reveals about your ego and what it does in the heart of its object.
- C. Since the choice between sin and Christ is so clear and definite, we must never tolerate sin.
1. You can't serve two masters!
 2. Christ died to free you from penalty and power!

Jesus on Divorce

Matthew 5:31-32

1. While these two verses also take the form of a contrast between what has been said (“It was said”) and what Jesus teaches (“but I say to you”), there seems to be a close connection to the verses which precede it. Most obvious is the fact that both address the issue of adultery. A less obvious indication is the variation in the way the contrast is set up (“It was said” vs. “You have heard that it was said”). The point that Jesus makes here is a distinct one, but it is related to what He has already said about adultery.
2. It is important for us to set the Lord’s teaching here within its historical context. We know from Matthew 19 that there was considerable debate in that day, as now, about divorce and remarriage. 19:3 probably gives us the best window into that debate. The question of the day was “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?”
 - a. Two main schools of thought were represented by two rabbis, Shammai and Hillel. Both found reason for divorce in the words “some indecency” in Deuteronomy 24:1. Shammai restricted this to moral indecency, while Hillel defined it broadly as anything unfavorable—even to the point a burnt meal. Another rabbi, Akiba, even allowed divorce if the man found someone more attractive.
 - b. Remember again the context of Matthew 5, Jesus is teaching the righteousness which surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees. Genuine righteousness is demonstrated in our most fundamental relationships and obligations, so it makes sense that Jesus would address the question of adultery (the violation of the marriage covenant) via both lust (v. 27-30) and divorce (vv. 31-32).
3. Let’s pause for a moment and recognize that this is the kind of subject and text that we have difficulty hearing correctly because we come to it with so many pre-set views and assumptions.
 - a. Our own experiences of divorce and remarriage may either cause us to be opposed to it completely or overly sympathetic toward it (i.e., minimize its significance).
 - b. Personal unhappiness within marriage may make one unwilling to hear what God wants—the operating principle becomes “it’s easier to get forgiveness than permission.”
 - c. Slippery slope concerns can predispose us to explain away uncomfortable statements because we worry that if we give an inch, we will lose a mile.
 - d. Lack of perspective on the history of this interpretive debate can lead to accusations of softness or accommodation to declining marriage standards.
4. There two interwoven principles within this text of Scripture:
 - a. Divorce (and remarriage) without biblical grounds is adultery.
 - i. Although the text does not directly state remarriage in the first half, most recognize that it is implied here and made clear in 19:9. Divorce was for the purpose of being free to marry again.
 - ii. The phrase “makes her commit adultery” may be taken either as (1) acknowledging the reality for a woman in that culture, or (2) a statement parallel to v. 28 with adultery being treated as unfaithfulness to the marriage covenant.
 - iii. The seriousness of this extends even to the one who marries an improperly divorced person (“whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery”). Though set in male terms, Mark 10 makes it clear that it applies both to both genders.
 - iv. God’s will from creation is one man, one woman, one lifetime. Marriage is based on a covenant that is until death (Rom 7:3).
 - v. It is important to recognize the difference between the act of adultery and the permanent state of adultery. Marrying outside of biblical grounds is an act of adultery, but the second marriage isn’t viewed as a continuous state of adultery: (1) the word used here is a verb, not the noun, so it is poorly translated as “become an adulteress;” and (2) the principle in Deut 24:1-4 prevents re-marriage to the former spouse.
 - b. Sexual sin allows divorce and remarriage without adultery (though it does not require it).

- i. The language of the text is clearly establishing an exception to the general rule (as does 19:9). God's normative will is one man and one woman for one lifetime.
 - ii. The word translated "unchastity" is *pornea* and becomes the point of debate then—what is the ground for this exception? Common approaches: (1) pre-marital sexual sin (generally or during the betrothal period); (2) unlawful marriages based on the incest commands; or (3) any type of sexual sin which violates the exclusivity of the marriage.
 - iii. The first is doubtful: (a) it reads in the betrothal, and (b) ends up making pre-marital sin more significant than marital infidelity.
 - iv. The second excessively narrows the meaning of the word, can't account for the debate between the rabbinic schools, and would really result in annulment, not divorce.
 - v. The third handles the word most properly and is consistent with the biblical teaching regarding the sanctity of the marriage bond. The two are to become one flesh, and that type of relationship is not to be shared with any other person as long as both are alive.
5. Some important application:
- a. This text should drive home again the seriousness of sexual sin!
 - b. This text grants permission, it does not create an obligation to end a marriage after infidelity. The difference is as clear as the word *may* versus the word *must* or even *should* in these circumstances. Given the permanence and sanctity of marriage, the orientation and disposition should always be toward forgiveness and reconciliation.
 - c. The text, therefore, acknowledges the reality of an innocent party (as does the OT, e.g., Lev 20:10 where only the participants of the adultery are to be executed). Innocent in the sense that he or she did not commit adultery, the spouse did. The old line that there are no innocent parties in a divorce must be modified—it applies to unbiblical divorces, but to claim this for all divorces is to contradict God's Word.
 - d. It must be conceded that the interpretation of the biblical teaching on this issue has led to very strong disagreements among equally committed students and servants of the Lord. That should: (1) produce humility, not arrogance in our position; (2) result in charity from both sides, e.g., no church discipline, no official sanction.
 - e. What about those who have sinned in this area? (1) confess your sin and move forward in the grace that comes from God through Jesus Christ; (2) if reconciliation is possible, pursue it; and (3) if it is not possible, resolve by God's grace to obey what God has said about your current condition.

The Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth

Matthew 5:33-37

Introduction:

1. People seem to love to play games with the truth. It really starts very young—how many times did you cross your fingers in order to invalidate something you said?
2. The fact is, in a world where the existence of truth is up for debate, we shouldn't be too surprised that telling the truth has become rare. It seems that we have developed a system where we talk on two levels in terms of truth: (1) the normal, day to day level where "truth" seems to be much more flexible, and (2) the legal level where we are obligated to tell the truth because of the consequences of lying. The breakdown of the first has caused the second to mushroom. The day when "a man's word was his bond" is being replaced by a "give it to me in writing" approach.
3. Oaths are a form of truth reinforcement. Someone or something is invoked as the guarantee of truthfulness. Usually, this means that if the truth is not being told that either the one invoked will act as judge or the thing pledged will be lost. "With God as my witness" represents the former and "on my family's honor" would illustrate the latter.
4. Probably because lying is a universal problem, oath taking is an ancient and universal practice. But, like most things, even the practice of oath taking can be manipulated to serve the purpose of liars. It's this sinful practice that Jesus next addresses in the Sermon on the Mount, and the righteousness that He demands of His follower is the kind that shows itself in speech that does not need oaths to back it up. ***A Christian's word should be good enough to stand alone. It should be truth without any props.***
5. In order to understand the point that the Lord is making, we will need to first understand the practice which He rejects and why.

I. The Problem: Using Lesser Oaths to Cloak Dishonesty (v. 33-36)

A. The Contemporary View, v. 33

1. Jesus does not quote directly from the OT, but gives a summary of what is found there in passages like:

Exodus 20:7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.

Leviticus 19:12 "You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD.

Numbers 30:2 "If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

2. The OT very clearly and properly prohibited anyone from invoking the Lord's name in connection with a vow or oath connected to anything false (including unfulfilled promises). That is, if you made an oath with the Lord's name, it better be true or you better make it true. Since God never lies, you better not misrepresent Him by a lie (and profane His name in doing so).

B. The Lord's Response, vv. 34-36

1. In contrast to v. 33, the Lord says "make no oath at all." This really is quite stunning in that He seems to be setting Himself against the OT and examples of believers in the NT. These words have been the basis for the position that a believer should not swear an oath even in legal proceedings, but merely affirm that their word is true. But is this the proper understanding of the Lord's command here?

2. To get a sense of how deep the tension is, consider that: (a) the OT practice sanctioned and, at some points, commanded for oaths to be made; (b) the Apostle Paul called God as his witness on a number of occasions (Rom 1:9; 2 Cor 1:23; 1 Ths 2:5, 10; cf. Phil 1:8; Gal 1:20) and even seems to have placed the Thessalonians under an oath (1 Ths 5:27); (c) God Himself offered an oath as confirmation of His promise to Abraham and Israel (Heb 6:17 “God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath”); and (d) the Lord Himself seems to have consented to an oath before the high priest (Mt 26:63-64).
3. I believe that this tension can be eased if we see that the Lord is addressing a practice in His day that resulted in people treating both the truth and God lightly. The focus is on “false vows” (v. 33) and how the practice of making oaths was being manipulated in order to avoid violating the OT law (vv. 34-36, cf. 23:16-22). The argument was that if God’s name was not used, then one was not obligated to the highest standard of truth.

II. The Principles

- A. There are no lesser oaths since God is sovereign over all things, vv. 34-36.
 1. Heaven and earth are the Lord’s, so swearing by anything in it obligates you to Him!
 2. Invoking your own life does not exempt one from obligation to God since He controls it too!
 3. There is no place to stand that would excuse a lie or allow you to escape accountability to God for falsehood.
- B. Your Yes should simply be a Yes and need no props for credibility, v. 37.
 1. The pattern of honesty which should mark Christians should render oaths unnecessary.
 2. Our view of truth telling should be so clear that we do so 24/7, not merely when we are under oath.
 3. Why is this so important? (a) Christ is the truth; (b) the devil is the father of lies; (c) relationships are built on truth and trust; and (d) our witness for Christ is affected by all we say.

Vengeance Is Not Mine

Matthew 5:38-42

Introduction:

1. The idea that evil will be punished is woven deeply into human existence because we are made in God's image. It gets expressed in many ways, a lot of them distorted, but the sense that there will be a payday for those who do evil is universal. It is right that wrong be punished—justice demands it.
2. People are so convinced of this principle, that they often want to make sure for themselves that punishment is inflicted. Vengeance and retaliation have filled human existence since the fall. We live in a dog eat dog world where a payback mindset often dominates.
3. This was true in the OT and during the time when the Lord Jesus Christ lived on earth. But it isn't God's will for human existence. Justice, yes. Payback, no.

I. The OT Law was designed to guarantee equal justice, v. 38.

Verse 38 is a restatement of the legal principle called *lex talionis* that is found in Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; and Deuteronomy 19:21. This principle is not unique to the OT, but shows up in places like the code of Hammurabi. It is a principle which seems intended to do two things: (1) establish a principle of equivalent justice that was guaranteed for all parties, and (2) provide a check against personal and tribal vengeance and vendettas.

Although it has come to be quoted as something of a payback principle, it really was intended to make sure that justice was served without respect of persons. Leviticus 24:22 helps us see this point when it uses the words, "There shall be one standard for you; it shall be for the stranger as well as the native, for I am the LORD your God." This principle was a guard against excessive punishment as well as against lenient punishment. In fact, it may be that it was more oriented toward making sure that the appropriate punishment was meted out since Deuteronomy introduces the principle with the words, "Thus you shall not show pity." If crimes are not adequately punished, then tend to multiply.

It is important to remember that this is a principle of the OT justice system, not one designed to govern personal relationships. That is, the application of an "eye for eye" was to be done by the courts and those who punish crimes. It was not to be carried out by the injured person or by others who take up the cause. There was no permission for personal retaliation and vengeance in the principle, yet it seems probable that this is what the common application of it came to be.

II. The righteousness which Christ demands rules out retaliation and requires a radical willingness to sacrifice self, vv. 39-42.

A. Christ's followers should not be controlled by a payback principle, 39a.

1. The Lord makes this point by calling for non-resistance, i.e., He establishes a point at the opposite end from revenge and retaliation.
2. The statement here should not be extended beyond personal matters since that would put it in contradiction with other Scriptures, e.g., Romans 13:4 speaks of government as "a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil."
3. It is not, therefore, a principle which demands total pacifism (elimination of police and military) or necessarily bars believers from involvement in these. Also, since it is a personal principle, it does not really apply in third person situations like stopping a crime or defending your family.
4. It also should not be understood in such a way that prevents one from making legitimate legal appeal for protection since Paul did so (Acts 25:11).
5. Rather than these applications, the point is simply that believers are not to embrace the dog eat dog mentality that too often consumes human relationships.

B. Christ's followers should willingly surrender their personal rights, vv. 39b-42.

1. The Lord drives the basic principle home through four examples of the kind of non-retaliation that He has in mind.
 - a. When someone insults you, allow yourself to be insulted again rather than seek revenge, v. 39. Right cheek probably indicates a backhanded slap which was a deliberate insult more than an act of violence.
 - b. When some tries to take your possessions in court, give him more than he asks for, v. 40. The inclusion of the coat is striking since the Mosaic Law barred a person from keeping someone's outer coat overnight since it was their protection against the elements at night (Exodus 22:26 ff).
 - c. When you are used, instead of resisting, volunteer more, v. 41. Probably refers to the Roman act of commandeering that allowed them to force people to carry their bags for a Roman mile (@ 1000 paces).
 - d. When someone wants to beg or borrow from you, give and do not refuse, v. 42. May refer to the same thing, but also could take into account those who are able to repay and those who cannot. "Loans would have as their goal getting people back on their feet; almsgiving assumed a continuing dependency" (Nolland, 260, n 247).
2. Without damaging the principle, we must recognize some qualifiers on these examples:
 - a. We should not interpret these in a rigidly literal manner. It seems that the Lord is using exaggerated language to teach a principle (like He did in vv. 29-30). Evidence: (1) is it really only about cheeks and only one turn? (2) should a believer be willing to walk out of court naked? (3) does the second mile apply only to miles or more than that?
 - b. What I said earlier about personal issues versus third party situations also has to be factored in to our application. That is, while I might personally endure a wrong, I may resist that same wrong being done against the church.
 - c. We must work toward a unified understanding of what the Bible teaches so that these texts are applied properly. For instance, what Jesus says here about responding to a slap in the face must be balanced with His counsel to the disciples to buy a sword (Luke 22:36). Also, what He says about giving to the one who asks must be balanced with the statement in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 that "if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either."
3. What these examples have in common is the willingness of the believer to relinquish his rights rather than demand them. Rather than retaliate, Christ's disciples lay down their right to respect and reputation (v. 39), property (v. 40), freedom (and so our time, v. 41), and to their money (v. 42).
 - a. Jesus is laying the axe at the root of sin in the human heart: self-centeredness. Pride drives our pursuit of reputation, accumulation, and autonomy. Attacks on these are met with hostility because they threaten what we worship since we worship what we live for.
 - b. Following Jesus Christ means that personal reputation, possessions, freedom, and money no longer control us. We are concerned about God's glory, not ours. We no longer truly own anything since it's the Lord's. We don't control our future, the Lord does, so if He allows us to be commandeered, then we view it as an assignment. We know that the Lord honors kindness toward the poor and needy (Proverbs 19:17 says, "One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed.")
4. If what Jesus teaches here seems radical, that's because it is. It is intended to expose the selfishness of the human heart. He was (and is) preaching what genuine repentance produces and what real righteousness looks like. It forces self-examination—am I like this? Am I willing to follow Christ like this?

- a. If you are unwilling to follow Christ like this, then you have not genuinely repented of your sin (the center of which is self!).
- b. It is vitally important that we recognize that what Christ demands here is not possible for sinners to accomplish. That's why He came! Cf. 1 Peter 2:21-26.

Conclusion:

- 1. The root of sin is selfishness. Genuine repentance strikes at this root.
- 2. Following Jesus Christ means embracing His example of self-sacrifice because you have been healed by the saving power of His death and returned from your straying.

Love Your Enemies!?!

Matthew 5:43-48

Introduction:

1. I love to preach. But preparing for these past two Sundays have been tough. What Jesus says here challenges and convicts me terribly.
2. We must all be open to the possibility that we have reshaped the Bible's teachings so that it fits what we want to do rather than we bend and submit to its authority.
3. This last set of contrasts probably hits home as hard as any that have preceded it. Murder, lust, divorce, and those kind of things are easily identified as wrong. But love your enemies takes us to places that we are naturally resistant toward. Whether our natural response is to punch someone's lights out or to cut them to pieces with our tongues, we all struggle with how to respond to our enemies.

I. The Contemporary Mindset, v. 43

It seems that some had drawn a conclusion from the OT that it was permissible to hate your enemies. It's not clear on what they based this view since, unlike the first part, the second part of the verse is not a quote of the OT. This is not a completely unwarranted conclusion. The OT did make a distinction between the neighbor and Israel's enemies, and the specific command to love your neighbor may open the door to the inference that others are excluded from this command. But it seems clear that they had distorted the sense of these texts and ignored others in order to justify hatred for non-neighbors.

II. The Master's Will: Jesus Christ calls His disciples to imitate God by being gracious to all, vv. 44-47

Rather than divide the world into two categories (neighbors and enemies) with two different responses, the Lord calls on them to show love to all indiscriminately. We all tend to love those who are like us and love us back, but Jesus calls His disciples to love even their enemies.

A. It's Nature, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"

1. Biblically, love is far less romantic and feeling-oriented than our modern conceptions of love. It means to seek the best interest of someone, to choose it. It isn't devoid of feeling, but not controlled by it like our modern ideas. Cf. Matt 6:24; Luke 14:26.
2. This is confirmed in this text by what else Jesus says: (a) "pray for" means to seek good for them; (b) the parallels with God's actions of causing the sun to rise and sending rain; and (c) the mention of greetings in v. 47.
3. The point is not that we should be warm-hearted and affectionate for our enemies as much as it is that we should do good to them, seek their best interests, cf. Rom 12:21 "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."
4. Nor is the point that we should love our enemies in the same way that we love our families or fellow believers. The point is that we are to demonstrate love commonly without grouping people into neighbor and enemy categories. Treat people as people, not as neighbor versus enemy.

B. It's Motivation, "so that you may be sons of your Father"

1. We need to be clear on what this means. The Lord is not telling them how to become sons of the Father (i.e., do this so that God will be your Father). The biblical concept of being a son of something means that you have the character of it. For example, when James and John want to call down fire from heaven to destroy some people, the Lord gave them a name which meant "Sons of Thunder" (cf. Mark

- 3:17). And Barnabas's name meant Son of Encouragement, i.e., one who was like encouragement. This was there way of saying "like father, like son" and "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree" kind of thing.
2. As the rest of vv. 45 makes clear, the reason the Lord says this focuses on the gracious character of God. How does He treat His enemies? "He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."
 - a. I can't help but point out the majestic view of God that is wrapped up in this statement—it is His sun and He controls even the weather patterns!
 - b. We need to dig in for a minute, but before we do that, let's not miss the basic point that the Lord is making: God does not discriminate between evil and good, righteous and unrighteous when He bestows these gifts and seeks the temporal good of humanity. The descriptions of evil/good and righteous/unrighteous are to be understood as corresponding to neighbor/enemy.
 3. God's actions here are what theologians call His common grace, i.e., His gracious actions toward all men without regard to their spiritual condition that provide the innumerable blessings of life.
 - a. Since the Bible is clear that all have sinned and the penalty of sin is death, the only just and righteous thing that God must do toward all sinners is punish them. They have committed crimes worthy of death, but God has not executed that sentence yet. The delay itself is an act of grace and every good thing that the condemned sinner enjoys is a gift of God's grace.
 - b. It is called common grace because it is bestowed on all sinners, not just saved sinners. It is distinguished from special or saving grace precisely because there is nothing saving about common grace. It is the foundation for saving or special grace, but common grace does not redeem.
 - c. This is the delicate balance that Scripture maintains: fallen humanity is at the same time the object of God's wrath and His love. Lost sinners are "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph 2:3) and "the wrath of God abides on" them (John 3:36). Yet, God has shown His love for them by giving them abundant blessings from heaven (like this text), even sending His Son into the world to reveal His glory and provide redemption (John 3:16).
 - d. Here also is a great danger for sinners—to confuse God's common grace for His special, saving grace. God's temporal gifts to you should never deceive you about yourself. They are meant to show you how great and gracious God is, not how worthy of these gifts you are! You need to hear and heed Paul's word to the Romans: "do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" (2:4).
 - e. There is coming a day when God's common grace will be removed and the full weight of His wrath will be felt. All of His gifts will stand as witness to His nature and man's depravity.
 4. The disciple of Jesus Christ who gets what genuine repentance is and has a heart for true righteousness will imitate God in showing love to both neighbor and enemy.
 - a. That love will seek the good of the other person rather than harm.
 - b. Does this rule out self-defense or war? I don't believe it does completely, but it should cause sincere followers to examine their hearts carefully. The reason I don't think it does is found in Paul's parallel instruction to this by the Lord. He says in Romans 12:18, "If possible, as far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." An attacker makes it impossible to be at peace. An aggressive army makes it impossible to be at peace.
 - c. What does this look like? Basically, find ways to do good to those who hate you! Treat them kindly and respectfully. Be helpful. Look out for their best interests. Saunders, Ouellette.

III. The Summary Command, v. 48

These words could apply only to this last antithesis or to the whole description of true righteousness which has been developed since v. 21. Since there is a change of direction in the Sermon after this verse, I am inclined toward the latter option, that is, that Jesus is summarizing this whole section of the Sermon. Rather than have the scribes

and Pharisees as the benchmark of righteousness (v. 20), the true standard is the character of God Himself. This has always been the case (be holy as I am holy), but man's constant temptation is to lower the standard.

The idea of perfect is whole and complete, or, our contemporary description of it would be that of integrity (no double-mindedness, duplicity, or hypocrisy). Paul uses the word to describe spiritual maturity. This is the righteousness which is the goal for true Christ followers. It can't be done in human strength because the human heart is sinful. The first step toward genuine godliness is the recognition of how far from it we are! Jesus Christ has masterfully painted the picture for us by showing us what God really expects. It should press us to repentance and create a hunger for righteousness in us that only God can satisfy by His grace.

No Showtime Religion

Matthew 6:1-4

Introduction:

1. True righteousness cannot be reduced to legalistic interpretations of God's will that focus on external conformity or the letter of the law.
2. True righteousness demands that we do the right thing for the right reasons.

I. The Principle: *Sincere righteousness is done for God, not people.*

I have chosen the word *sincere* because of the emphasis throughout this passage on hypocrisy (vv. 2, 5, 16). The Lord is confronted the hypocritical practice of righteousness. The concept of hypocrisy has a few different shades, but the basic idea of the Greek word meant to play a part, to act. Sometimes it means to act outwardly in ways that contradict the internal. Another kind of hypocrisy is to act one way in one setting, but then act quite differently in another. In this case, I believe the heart of their hypocrisy is that there were acting as if they were serving God, but in reality they were doing it "to be noticed by" people (v. 1).

They weren't really serving God at all—they were serving themselves. They practiced righteousness for the benefit of being "honored by men" (v. 2). The Gospel of John states it very bluntly, "they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God" (John 12:43). So, at the end of the day, what they really loved was self, not God.

The issue raised in this text is a major one. The sinful human heart feeds on the applause of people. Making a name for yourself is hailed as a virtue. That's why the Scriptures list as "the boastful pride of life" as one of the core elements of worldliness (1 John 2:16). We were made to serve and worship God, but our sinful hearts long to serve ourselves and have others worship us. And this quest for self-worship isn't restricted to athletes, CEOs and celebrities. It even infects the religious realm. People practice righteousness to be noticed by other people. They are conspicuous in doing good and practicing piety.

Let's make sure we're clear on the problem here. It's not practicing piety. The passage makes it very clear that the Lord expects that His followers will do that. It's not the act that's the problem. It's the motive—for God or for self? It's what the heart treasures—God's glory or our own?

It's also what the heart believes as the ultimate reward for godliness—human recognition or divine reward. And that moves this into a temporal versus eternal dimension. Are we living for what we can obtain now in terms of praise for ourselves from people or are we living for what God has promised to those who love and trust Him?

Doing right for the wrong reasons reveals a heart that loves self more than God, that wants personal glory more than God's glory, and that treasures temporal pleasure and praise above God's promises and reward. *Sincere righteousness is done for God, not people.*

II. The Practice, vv. 2-4

A. The Responsibility, "when you give to the poor"

Notice that the Lord assumes that His disciples will in fact give to the poor since He states it as "So when you give to the poor" not as "if you give to the poor." Care for the poor was a clear responsibility of the OT saint (Deut 15:7-11; cf. Ps 112:9). Proverbs 19:17 says, "One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed." But it wasn't just a responsibility of the OT saint within Israel. It is carried over into the NT as a responsibility for believers as well:

- Acts 20:35 "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"
- Galatians 2:10 They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.
- Ephesians 4:28 He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.

- James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.
- 1 John 3:17-18 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? {18} Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

Of course, this must be integrated with other biblical responsibilities (family, ministry) and biblical truth (work to eat). Yet, it is possible that we have neglected this responsibility because of its abuse by liberal groups and by the intrusion of government.

B. The Restriction, “do not sound a trumpet...as the hypocrites do”

Basic point: don't draw attention to yourself! This what galls me about most modern money raising tactics—they actually embrace what the Lord forbid. The net result is that they have not served God or His people well at all.

C. The Reason, “reward in full...your Father who sees in secret...will reward you”

If your goal is human approval, then you will hit your goal and nothing more! If you are motivated by God and His promises, then you will deny your pride and receive His blessing.

Concluding applications:

1. Don't talk about it, just do it.
2. Do it when no one is looking.
3. Keep doing it when no one notices.
4. Continually remind yourself that human applause is short-lived, shallow, and quickly subject to change. Ripken illustration.
5. Constantly remind yourself that God never misses anything and never forgets what ever is done for His name!

Draw Near to God, Not Attention to Yourself

Matthew 6:5-8

Context: *Sincere righteousness is done for God, not for people.*

I. Sincere Prayer Seeks to Draw Near to God, Not Draw Attention to Self, vv. 5-6.

A. Responsibility, “When you pray...”

1. Christians are prayers (1 Cor 1:2 “with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours;” 1 Pet 1:17 “if you address as Father”).
2. Prayer is a spiritual discipline that demands commitment 1 Ths 5:17; Col 4:2).

B. Restriction, “may be seen by men”

1. The point here is not against public prayer. It is against prayer as a PR stunt! The “so that” in the middle of the verse exposes the root issue: motive. I.e., they do what they do for the purpose of being seen by people. It is not primarily about location (“in the synagogues” and “on the street corner”) or about posture while praying (“stand” as opposed to kneeling).
2. The Lord Himself prayed in public to be heard by people (John 11:41-42; cf. John 6:11). The disciples practiced public prayer continually (e.g., Acts 1:14; 4:23 ff; 12:5, 12). The church is even commanded to pray together (1 Tim 2:1, 8).
3. So this cannot be taken to ban all but private prayer. It focuses on the hypocrisy of “talking” to God only for the purpose of being seen doing so.

C. Reasons, “reward in full...will reward you”

1. Stated negatively, “they have their reward in full”—implication is that their prayers will not be heard and that they will receive no blessing for their devotion to prayer.
2. Stated positively, “your Father...will reward you”—implication is that their prayer will be heard and they will be blessed by God for their devotion to Him.
 - a. A desire for some “blessing” or “reward” is not sinful in itself—Hebrews 11:6 ties it to the kind of faith that pleases God!
 - b. I would contend that desire is an essential part of genuine prayer—if we don’t want what we ask for, then we are not praying sincerely; in fact, if we don’t want at all, we tend not to pray at all!
 - c. Alongside of desire must be confidence in the power and goodness of God that makes prayer a reality—we believe He is able and will do what is best for His children.

II. Sincere Prayer is Meaningful, Not Manipulative, vv. 7-8.

The Lord expands on the subject of prayer in vv. 7-15 by going beyond the basic principle and its application (as He does with giving and fasting). The point of vv. 7-8 is that prayer should not be viewed as a method to twist God’s arm into giving us what we want or need. Why do I believe this is the point?

1. Let’s start in the second half of both verses and see the explanation that the Lord gives: (a) “for the suppose that they will be heard for their many words” indicates that the pagans believed that their deities could be moved by simply multiplying words; (b) “for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him” indicates that God does not need “many words” to inform Him or to move Him to act on behalf of His children. So, the combination of these two puts an emphasis on what makes prayer effective.

2. The Lord describes the prayers of the Gentiles as using “meaningless repetition” in order to obtain answers. The word translated “meaningless” is a unique and rare word. DBAG states about it that it means “to speak in a way that images the kind of speech pattern of one who stammers, *use the same words again and again*” (p. 172). Some commentators see it as a reference to babbling speech used in prayer. Whatever its exact meaning, the parallel with “many words” in the second half of the verse shows that the point is multiplied words aimed at securing an answer by sheer volume.
3. We do need to be clear that what Jesus says here does not prohibit any and all repetition in prayer. The Lord Himself did that (26:42-44), as did the Apostle Paul (2 Cor 12:8). And it can’t be taken to rule out persistently praying for what we need from the Lord since the Lord Himself taught us to pray persistently (cf. Luke 11:5-8; 18:1 ff).
4. The point here goes below the action to the attitude and beliefs which prompt it. Do we believe that repeating certain words (including entire prayers!) over and over again will somehow give us leverage with God that gets the answer we want? If so, then we are praying like pagans.
5. Instead, we should view prayer as a God-given opportunity to talk with our Father about our needs because we know that He knows and cares about them.
6. So why pray: (1) devotion—we turn to Him, not away from Him in need; (2) dependence—we express our need for His gifts.

The Disciples' Prayer

Matthew 6:9-13

I. The Context of the Disciples' Prayer

The word *then* in v. 9 indicates that what the Lord teaches about prayer in vv. 9-15 is directly related to what has preceded it. It is a corrective to the hypocritical praying which Jesus rejects.

- A. Overarching Theme: *Sincere righteousness is done for God, not for people* (v. 1).
- B. Principles Regarding Sincere Prayer, vv. 5-8
 - 1. It Seeks to Draw Near to God, Not Draw Attention to Self, vv. 5-6.
 - 2. It is Meaningful, Not Manipulative, vv. 7-8.

II. The Character of the Disciples' Prayer

A. It is for Disciples, "Our Father"

- 1. It is true that God is the Father of all humans in a general sense since He is our Creator (cf. Acts 17:29 "being then the children of God"). But, there is a special sense in which only those who have trusted in Jesus Christ can truly call God their Father, cf. John 1:12-13, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."
- 2. Contrary to popular opinion, not all prayer is acceptable to God. The context makes this abundantly clear—Jesus is rebuking hypocritical prayer and says that God will not reward it. Proverbs 15:29 says "The LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous" and Proverbs 28:9 states "He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination." The prayer that God accepts come to Him through Jesus Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:18).
- 3. God's children are given wonderful promises and incentives to pray. At the root of them all is our relationship with God as our Father. This language gives us confidence about God's disposition toward us—a Father who loves His children—and it encourages us to look to Him for our needs.

B. It is for Disciples as a Group, "Our...us...we"

- 1. The plural pronouns emphasize the place of this prayer among the believers as they assemble. It is a prayer for public, not private prayer. That fits the context well. Remember, part of the meaning of vv. 7-8 was against long prayers in public (cf. Mark 12:40 "for appearance's sake offer long prayers").
- 2. The NT is clear that the congregation of believers is to be a place of prayer!

C. It is for a Pattern, not for Repetition, "Pray...in this way" (not "Pray this").

- 1. The way in which the Lord introduces this prayer is important. He is showing them *how* to pray, not *what* to pray.
- 2. Verses 7-8 clearly rule out all "meaningless repetition" and the false belief that simply multiplying words accomplishes anything special. Those with Catholic backgrounds know that these words bear the label the "Our Father" and are repeated six times during the Rosary.
- 3. It is significant that in the gospel of Luke the Lord teaches His disciples to pray with similar, yet distinct words (11:2-4). The differences seem to make it clear that the Lord was giving them a model for prayer, not a prayer to be repeated.

4. The fact that the Lord and the disciples pray in other ways and never repeat this prayer should raise real questions about anyone demanding that true devotion be expressed in this way.
5. Is it wrong to pray this prayer? No. Since it is Scripture, it provides us with words which we can use to talk with God. But we are not bound to recite the whole prayer completely when we borrow its language and we are certainly not bound to repeat it in any ritual or ceremony.

III. The Content of the Disciples' Prayer

A. Talk to the Father about the Father, vv. 9-10.

1. That His Name Will Be Honored, "hallowed be Your name"
2. That His Kingdom Will Come
3. That His Will Be Done
 - a) Three uses of "will" in Scripture: decree, declared, desire. The petition probably embraces all three, i.e., (a) that God's sovereign purposes would be fulfilled; (b) that His revealed will would govern human affairs; and (c) that His people would do His work (cf. Col 4:12).
 - b) There is no conflict between the belief that God has a sovereign purpose for all things and prayer about those very things. God has appointed both end and means.
 - c) *On earth as it is in heaven* calls for a perfect completion of His will. There are some who take this as attached to all three petitions, not just this last one. Even if not technically so, in reality when God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven, then His name will be honored and His kingdom will have come.

B. Talk to the Father about His Children, vv. 11-13.

1. About Our Daily Needs, v. 11
 - a. *Bread* is used as representative of all our food, and probably for all of our daily needs. This idiom has carried over into English when we talk about the "breadwinner" in the home or trying to make some "bread" (as in money). I don't imagine "bring home the bacon" was a popular slogan in Israel!
 - b. The word translated *daily* is a very rare word that emphasizes the dependence of the prayer on God's provision. Western cultures don't tend to live literally day to day, but many in the biblical culture did (and many others still do). They were day laborers whose lives depended on daily provision.
 - c. That God would give us something we have a responsibility to work for is not a problem. It is God who gives both strength and opportunity for us to provide for ourselves.
2. About Our Spiritual Needs, vv. 12-13
 - a. Forgiveness, v. 12
 - 1) The word "debts" stresses that we had an obligation to God that we failed to meet whether through commission or omission.
 - 2) "As we also have forgiven" identifies as characteristic of the Lord's disciples—because they have been forgiven, they forgive others (cf. Eph 4:32).
 - b. Protection, v. 13
 - 1) As we learned at 4:1, the Greek word for "tempted" or "temptation" also means "tested" or "testing" so there is some debate about which these means in this particular verse.

- 2) Some feel it can't mean "Don't bring us into the place of testing" since testing is to be received with joy (Jas 1:2) and the Spirit did exactly that with Jesus in 4:1.
- 3) Obviously, God does not tempt people, so we have to be careful there too (Jas 1:14).

Forgiveness and Fasting

Matthew 6:14-18

Introduction:

1. The old line “monkey see, monkey do” captures a reality of human existence—we all learn by observation and imitation. And not all that we learn is good! That is, we can learn from bad examples sometimes more than we do from good examples. This may be especially true when it comes to the practice of piety.
2. The Lord Jesus has been confronting some false, hypocritical practices of piety. People practicing their righteousness to be seen by other people. He boldly and directly calls it hypocritical and declares that it is spiritually worthless. He gains man’s applause, but not God’s approval. *Sincere righteousness is done for God, not for show*. When you give to the poor, do so without fanfare. When you pray, do it so that you can draw close to God, not draw attention to yourself.
3. And when you pray, don’t pile up words thinking that you can get what you want that way. God is a Father who knows what you need before you even ask, so talk with Him simply and directly. Make His glory and will your first priority, then talk to Him about your daily and spiritual needs.
4. The third practice of piety which the Lord addresses is the matter of fasting, but before we look at this, we need to finish His instruction about prayer. In what seem like an odd way, the Lord tacked an explanation about forgiveness on to the model for prayer that He gave His disciples.

I. The Condition for the Disciples’ Prayer: Forgiveness, vv. 14-15.

Verses 14-15 elaborate on the portion of the Disciples’ Prayer that mentions forgiveness. The prayer is built on the expectation that people seeking forgiveness will also be extending forgiveness to others. That’s the force of the words “forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” These two verses show that there is a close connection between our forgiving and our forgiveness. It’s very important that we understand this connection properly.

The connection is not that our forgiving others earns or merits God’s forgiveness. The Bible is clear that we are forgiven because of God’s grace (i.e., as a gift on the basis of Christ’s righteousness, cf. Eph 1:7). Instead, the connection goes back to the theme of the sermon—the nature of genuine repentance and true righteousness.

People who are unforgiving have never genuinely understood their own sinfulness. And if they have not grasped the depth of their own sin, they have not really repented. Those who do not view themselves as needing mercy are stingy with mercy.

One aspect of the heart of true righteousness is captured in 7:12, “treat people in the same way you want them to treat you.” As we’ll see when we get there, this is parallel in some ways to the second great commandment since it is joined to similar words (“for this is the Law and the Prophets”). Apply this to the issue of forgiving others—do you want to be forgiven? Absolutely. Then treat others the way that you want them to treat you.

How do we increase our capacity for forgiving others (and guard against bitterness in doing so)? (1) Focus on the depth and depravity of our own sin, not the sins of other people—the one who is forgiven much, loves much; (2) Remember that we did not deserve forgiveness, so it is wicked and hypocritical to demand that others earn it; (3) True righteousness wants for other people what it wants for itself—if you want to be forgiven, then you should want it for others as well.

II. The Practice of Fasting, vv. 16-18

A. What is fasting?

1. The Definition of Fasting

- a. “The act of total or partial abstinence from food for a limited period of time, usually undertaken for moral or religious purposes” (*EDT*, p. 406).

- b. "A biblical definition of fasting is a Christian's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes" (Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, p. 152)

2. The Length of Fasts

Scripture presents a varied picture of the lengths of fasts. Fasts appear to run normally from morning to evening (Judg 20:26; 2 Sam 1:12) but could sometimes extend to longer periods (cf Esther 4:16; 1 Sam 31:13). The longest recorded fasts were those of Moses (Ex 34:28), Elijah (1 Kgs 19:8), and the Lord (Mt 4:2). These appear to be abnormal and sustained in a supernatural way.

3. The Type of Fast

- a. The *normal* fast is one which abstains from all food (solid and liquid) for a prescribed period of time but permits the drinking of liquid.
- b. The *partial* fast limits the diet of particular foods, but some is allowed, cf. Dan 10:3.
- c. The *absolute* fast requires abstinence from food and liquids in all forms, cf. Exo 34:28; Est 4:16.

Each type is observed in Scripture. The most common is obviously the *normal* fast. A *partial* fast was observed by Daniel (Dan 10:3), and, as difficult as it may seem, Moses kept an *absolute* fast for forty days and nights (Ex 34:28). The extreme nature and length of the fast of Moses seemed to combine to point toward a Divine enablement for its accomplishment. A shorter *absolute* fast was called for by Esther (Est 4:16). It seems that the point is not in the particular type of fast as much as in the objective of the fasting, i.e. the self-restriction of our eating habits and patterns.

B. Why did they fast?

There is an interesting Hebrew phrase used in connection with fasting, and even taken by some as a means of expressing the idea, which gives us insight into the meaning of fasting. The phrase *you shall humble your souls* used in Lev 16:29 is taken to mean fasting because of its association with it in Isa 58:3 and Ps 35:13. The fast is intended to be an affliction of the inner person (TWOT, 2:758). There is a strong focus of self-denial and self-renunciation in the discipline of fasting. As Walter Kaiser notes, "they voluntarily afflicted their bodies to do without food in order to physically join in the grief of their souls" (*Quest for Renewal*, p. 59).

This aspect of fasting is latently identified by our Lord in His words to those who questioned Him about His disciples' lack of participation in fasting. His answer to His detractors indicates that He associated fasting with mourning. He says to them "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot *mourn* as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will *fast*" (Mt 9:15 NASB). There is at least as much as the convincing association of fasting with strong emotional feeling like that described in the OT practice. More will be seen about this when we discuss the motivations for fasting which are presented in Scripture.

Given the meaning of fasting we have already presented earlier, one would expect fasting to be motivated by circumstances that take firm hold on the one who sets him/herself to this discipline. The record of fasting in Scripture confirms this impression. Here are some of the circumstances which prompt fasting in the OT Scripture (found in the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, pp. 502ff): (1) Day of Atonement; (2) Times of Distress (wars, sickness, mourning, repentance, impending danger); (3) Prep for revelation; (4) worship and service; (5) Commencement of ministry; and (6) consecrating people to the Lord's care.

The common denominator among all of them appears to be the seriousness of the occasion or circumstance. Each response of fasting was in connection with some event or occasion which called for the highest level of fervency by the one who gives him/herself to the task of fasting. It appears that fasting was the concrete expression of the response of the heart or spirit. That response of the inner person may be grief over the death of someone (2 Sam 1:12), repentance for sin (Neh 9:1; Jon 3:5-7), earnest desire for Divine help (2 Sam 12:16-23), or desire for and receptivity to Divine disclosure (Acts 9:9; Dan 9:3).

In all except the matter of grief over someone's death the idea of prayer is inextricably linked to fasting, and it may be implied in that case. The focus of the discipline appears to be the commitment of the total self in expressing the response or desire of the inner person. It is the clear demonstration of the inner heart attitude and commitment.

1. To Humble Ourselves before the Lord, Ps 35:13; Ezra 8:21; Isa 58:5

2. To Help Us Pray to the Lord, Dan 9:3; Isa 58:4

C. What was wrong with their fasting?

There appear to be two main misuses of the discipline of fasting. The first is criticized in the OT prophets and the second was denounced by the Lord in the Sermon on the Mount.

1. Fasting as Empty Ritual, Isa 58:3 ff.

The pattern of Israel was to turn the fast into a ritual which could be used as leverage to move God to do their bidding (cf Isa 58:3 ff.). The LORD rejected this manipulative approach to fasting and demanded that only fasting which accompanied the proper self-renunciation and submission that issues forth in obedience (vv. 6-7). The fast cannot be used as an empty ritual to guarantee a hearing with God. Jeremiah records of the Lord as He refuses to hear them in spite of their fasting (14:12).

The only acceptable fast was one that was based in a desire to follow the Lord and seek righteousness. A self-centered fast earned no standing before God. Unfortunately the Israel often pursued a path of self-centered fasting which led the Lord to challenge their practice (Zech 7:5). He wonders, rhetorically, for whom they fasted over the period of the seventy years ("was it actually for Me that you fasted" NASB). Certainly this type of ritualistic fast was not the God-centered fast that receives the approval of our God.

2. Fasting as Public Display, Matt 6:16-18

A second misuse of fasting was exemplified by the Pharisees and challenged by the Savior in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6:16-18). Their abuse of the discipline was in its ostentatious display of their piety. Their practice was to "neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men" (v 16 NASB). In contrast to this pattern, the Lord charges the disciples to fast discreetly and take active measures (v 17) so that they will not be observed by men (v 18). The only One who should know, and is the only One that matters, is the Heavenly Father (v 18).

D. Should we fast today?

That fasting was common in the Old Testament is obvious from the frequent mention of its practice. However, there was only one day of legislated fasting in the Israelite economy and that was the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29 ff.). There was no command for regular fasting to be observed by the OT saints. Outside of the national fast on the Day of Atonement, it appears to be a matter of voluntary fasting. We can observe that by the period of the exile there were four fasts that were being observed annually (Zech 8:19), but these are not required by Yahweh (in fact He rejects the way in which they were being observed--see below).

For the New Testament believer the fast associated with the Day of Atonement has obviously been eliminated, but what about fasting at other times or at all? There is some debate about the matter of fasting and whether it is a required or commanded practice for believers of the present age.

1. The Lord began His ministry with a prolonged fast (Mt 4:2).
2. Christ's most substantial teaching on fasting (Mt 6:16-18) is joined in context with the issues of prayer (6:6-15) and giving (6:1-5). The language gives the impression that believers will fast (*whenever you fast*).

3. When the Lord is asked why He and His disciples do not fast like the Pharisees and John's disciples, He answers by asserting that it would not be appropriate while He, the bridegroom, was still with them, but the "days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast" (Mt 9:15). The inference drawn from this text is that fasting is appropriate for the interim between the advents of our Lord.
4. The argument that the NT epistles do not mention the matter of fasting seems to misread the two autobiographical texts by Paul in 2 Corinthians (6:5; 11:27).

Conclusions about Fasting:

Given all of the biblical data and the absence of any regulatory commands about the frequency of fasting, how should the believer incorporate fasting into his "exercise" toward godliness?

4. It should be noted that fasting is not an essential exercise of spiritual discipline, i.e. we are not exhorted to fast in the same way we are to pray and to study the Word. That is not to minimize its significance (we have already argued that it should be practiced), but to recognize that it is not presented in Scripture as an on-going discipline of spiritual growth or a means by which we grow spiritually. These may occur along with fasting, but we are not told to fast in order to grow (as we are told to study the Word in order to grow).
5. It should be noted that fasting is not an independent exercise of spiritual discipline, i.e., fasting is a discipline which most often should be participated in conjunction with prayer and the study of the Word. It expresses an earnestness of our hearts toward some particular need or circumstance for which we seek Divine help or answer. Fasting enables us to focus our attention on God and become aware of His presence, and hence we can worship Him more effectively.
6. It should be noted that fasting, by inference, can be a valuable discipline tool to help us: (a) reinforce our dependence upon God and His Word rather than material things (Mt 4:4); (b) break the external control of lives by temporal matters (1 Cor 6:12); (c) bring our bodies into subjection (1 Cor 9:27); and, (d) demonstrate that our appetites are not our God (Rom 16:18; Phil 3:19).

Practical Application Issues:

1. Purposeful—Establish clear prayer purposes and/or spiritual goals for any period of fasting, i.e., know why you are abstaining;
2. Preparation—schedule and prepare to utilize normal meal times as times of prayer and meditation, not just additional free hours;
3. Planning—select the time(s) of fasting carefully so as to assist yourself in maintaining the commitment and accomplishing the purposes of the fast period;
4. Promptings—allow hunger pangs to be prayer reminders; and,
5. Partners—discreetly communicate intentions to those who will be affected by the decision to fast so that you eliminate unnecessary conflicts.

Undistracted Devotion to the Lord

Matthew 6:19-24

Introduction:

1. The more I study this sermon, the more I am convinced that its essential message is still a great need in our day. The Lord confronted a religious world that has many parallels with ours—people assume that they are right with God by virtue of their religious affiliation. If you ask someone today if they are a Christian, they will say yes because they know they're not Muslim or a Buddhist, but do they really know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior?
2. This sermon cuts to the heart by its continual focus on genuine repentance and true righteousness. It holds up a mirror so that every hearer must look himself in the face and do a spiritual examination.
3. Legalistic interpretations that manipulate God's Law distort true righteousness. Righteousness done for show is not accepted by God.
4. This next section calls for undistracted commitment to and confidence in God.

I. Two Treasures, vv. 19-21

It seems clear from the description in these verses that the Lord is talking about the use of our material goods. Though the text does not restrict it to this, this is the clear emphasis of the passage: (1) material things; (2) wealth/mammon; and (3) food, clothing, etc.

A. Their Nature, vv. 19-20

1. Earthly and Temporal, v. 19

- a. The language clearly emphasizes the fleeting and unsafe condition of this treasure—moth and rust can destroy it, thieves can steal it.
- b. Wealth in biblical times was very seldom, if ever, the kind of paper wealth of our day.

2. Heavenly and Eternal, v. 20

- a. In contrast to treasure stored up on the earth, the treasure stored in heaven cannot be touched by decay and thieves.
- b. The only 100% safe and secure investment of our resources is with God!

B. Their Importance, v. 21

1. Our heart will be focused where what we treasure is located. If we invest ourselves in this world, then that's where our heart will fix its attention and affection.
2. This really is the point of what the Lord is teaching. God doesn't need our money. He wants our hearts!

II. Two Visions, vv. 22-23

A. The Principle, v. 22a

1. The Lord's teaching shifts from heart to eye in order to continue driving home His point. How does the heart become what it is? The first part of v. 22 answers that question—the affections of the heart are turned in the direction that the eye looks.
2. The "eye is the lamp of the body" in the sense that it is the window through which light comes into the body.

B. The Implications, vv. 22b-23a

1. The words “so then if” point out that in practice the eye can either be a source of light or darkness to the soul, depending on whether the eye is “clear” or “bad.” NASB’s *clear* translates a word that means single and speaks of its wholeness, integrity, therefore its health.
2. The physical eye stands as a metaphor for the spiritual longings or desires of the person (really what the heart wants). If the eye longs selfishly for material things, then it is not healthy from God’s perspective, and the soul is filled with darkness.

C. The Warning, v. 23b

1. It almost sounds like a contradiction to say the light is darkness, but that’s the point. It emphasizes the utter darkness of the soul when its light is actually darkness.
2. The Lord wants us to understand how dangerous it is to have an eye that longs for the things of this world—it fills the soul with darkness.

III. Two Masters, v. 24

A. The Principle, v. 24a

1. The nature of slavery is sole ownership—you have one master. In our day, people easily have two jobs and so two bosses, but the picture here is more drastic than that. It’s ownership.
2. The language of hate and love is that of choice and priority, as the parallel words “devoted” and “despise” indicate.

B. The Application, v. 24b

1. “Wealth” is a good translation of the word *mammon*. That word stands for more than just money. It sums up all of our material possessions and prosperity.
2. God will not tolerate rivals or dual ownership, cf. 1 John 2:15-17.

Conclusion:

1. Summary: (a) you can’t hold them; (b) they can’t hold you!
2. The real issue in this passage is heart loyalty. Most, if not all, of the Lord’s original audience and the congregation here this morning would profess loyalty and allegiance to God. That’s the claim that comes from our lips, but is it true in our hearts?
3. How can we tell if it is really true? Where are you storing up treasure? How do you look at the world around you?
4. How can we stir our hearts to love properly? By storing up treasuring.

Undistracted Devotion to the Lord II

Matthew 6:24

I. The Principle Stated

3. The nature of slavery is sole ownership—you have one master. In our day, people easily have two jobs and so two bosses, but the picture here is more drastic than that. It's ownership.
4. The language of hate and love is that of choice and priority, as the parallel words “devoted” and “despise” indicate.
5. “Wealth” is a good translation of the word *mammon*. That word stands for more than just money. It sums up all of our material possessions and prosperity.
6. God will not tolerate rivals or dual ownership, cf. 1 John 2:15-17.

II. The Choice It Demands

This principle demands that each person make a choice. You cannot serve two masters, so you must decide which master you will serve. Dual allegiance is by default no allegiance to God.

A. This presents a real problem for all of humanity.

1. Your heart is captive to idolatry.

Deuteronomy 5:29 'Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!
Deuteronomy 10:16 "So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer.

2. You must have a new heart placed in you by God Himself.

Deuteronomy 29:4 "Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear.
Romans 2:28-29 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. {29} But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

B. It is a constant and inevitable battle even for believers.

1. We live in an atmosphere which rejects God, face an adversary whose purpose is to destroy us, and we fight with fallen appetites within that enshrine our own desires and lusts.
2. A genuine believer cannot peacefully live for any Master but Jesus Christ, Gal 5:16; 1 John 3:4-10.

III. The Examination It Prompts

Self-examination is a crucial, but neglected, responsibility. Paul urged the Corinthians to “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?” (2 Cor 13:5). It's an important part of how we “Watch over [our] heart[s] with all diligence” (Pro 4:23) and “Watch the path of [our] feet” so that “all [our] ways will be established” (Pro 4:26).

A. Do you give to anything or anyone what you can only properly give to the Lord?

1. Love (Matt 6:24; 22:37)

2. Devotion (Matt 6:24)
3. Fear (1 Sam 12:24)
4. Hope (Ps 42:5)
5. Control (2 Cor 5:14)

B. Do you look to anything or anyone for what you can only ultimately look to the Lord?

1. Refuge and safety (Ps 62:1-2)
2. Approval (Gal 1:10)
3. Joy and satisfaction (Ps 16:11)

C. What makes you angry? Discouraged?

D. What are your goals and dreams in life? Where did they come from?

E. What occupies your thoughts, daydreams, planning?

F. When you count a day as a “good day” or a week as a “good week”, what place does your walk with the Lord and service for Him have in that evaluation?

G. When you’re under a lot of pressure, what do you do for comfort, pleasure, escape?

H. How do you spend your time? What are your priorities?

I. What do you talk about most?

J. Who are your role models? What kind of person do you think you ought or want to be?

K. What do you pray for and about?

Conclusion:

1. You can only have one master. You start this life with the wrong one. You have willingly devoted yourself to things created instead of to your Creator. There is no hope for you unless God mercifully, graciously gives you a new heart.
2. And if He has given you a new heart, then that heart will never be satisfied serving something other than God. Examine yourself on this basis!
3. If you know Christ as your Redeemer, then He’s your Lord. Serve Him with all of your heart! One day you will see Him in all of His glory, and on that day you want to present to Him a life that was lived for His glory. Don’t be deceived into shopping the dollar store of this world.

Undistracted Devotion to the Lord III

Matthew 6:25-34

Introduction:

1. Core truth is v. 24.
2. What comes before and follows opens our eyes to whether we serve God or mammon—what do we do with our material goods and what do we do without them!

I. What does worry reveal about you?

A. You love material things too much, vv. 24-25.

But the key to understanding the worry-worldliness connection is found in v. 24 where the Lord draws a clear line in the sand between living for God or living for Mammon (money or wealth). I believe this is the key to understanding the worry-worldliness connection because of the way v. 25 starts: “For this reason” (KJV—“Therefore”). In other words, the Lord applies the teaching of v. 24 directly to the issue of worry—worry reveals that you serve mammon! So, we should understand the word “serve” as meaning that it controls you or, in the words of v. 33, you are seeking it.

The Lord’s teaching in the parable of the sower provides some helpful insight into what we find here in Matthew 6. In Matthew 13:22, while the Lord is explaining the parable and describing the various soils, He says that the seed sown among the thorns is “the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.” Do you see the connection? The “worry” or “care” of this world is related to temporal and material things—providing for life in this world.

Let’s be clear about this so that we don’t miss the point. We all must responsibly provide for life in this world—2 Thessalonians 3:10 says, “if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.” The problem is not with providing for life in this world; the real problem is living for these provisions, with letting providing for life take priority over God’s purposes. Providing for life is not the goal! The goal of life is God, so providing for life must serve His purposes, not become our purpose in life.

B. You don’t trust God like you ought, vv. 26, 28-30.

How does worry relate to worldliness? Part of the answer to that question is found in the fact that worry reveals that we lack trust in God, v. 30. If we are controlled by worry then we are not resting in God’s promises to care for His children. Cf. Phil 4:6-7; 1 Peter 5:6-7.

C. You are wasting your time, v. 27.

D. You are living like a lost person, v. 32.

This text establishes a governing principle for God’s people—God’s purposes must be our highest priority (they trump all temporal concerns!). Seeing this principle as it is taught in this context provides us with some helpful insight into one of our greatest personal struggles and most threatening challenge to the health of the church in the 21st century—worldliness, cf. 6:32. The Lord is calling His disciples to a life that is radically different than the pagans around them.

The mark of worldliness is when the things that God has provided for us in this life become the motivation and measurement of our lives. If they become the goal rather than the means to reaching God’s goal, then we have been captured by worldliness. Paul could say that believers are to “use the world, as though they do not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away” (1 Cor 7:31).

Consider what God says to us in Philippians 3:19-20 and Colossians 3:2. Believers are called to live for heavenly, eternal, and spiritual priorities, not earthly, temporal, and carnal ones. “Worldliness is allowing one’s appetites, ambitions, or conduct to be fashioned according to earthly values” (John MacArthur).

Worldliness may be expressed in many different ways, but it always has the same root—loving and living for earthly, temporal things more than the heavenly and eternal. Common ways in which worldliness expresses itself: the pursuit of temporal pleasures outside of God’s revealed will or at the expense of God’s will (1 Pet 2:11; 4:2); storing up treasure for yourself rather than being rich toward God (Luke 12:21); loving the approval of people more than the approval of God (John 12:43); allowing even the good things of this life to absorb your energies completely (1 Cor 7:31 ff.); and fitting too comfortably in with the lifestyle of those who do not know Christ and have no hope beyond this life (Phil 3:19-21).

II. How can we do battle with worry?

- A. Submit Yourself to God’s Plan and Provision, vv. 28-32; cf. 1 Peter 5:6-7.
- B. Prioritize Your Values, v. 33; cf. v. 24.
- C. Concentrate on Daily Obedience and Trust, v. 34.

The Dangers of Judgmentalism

Matthew 7:1-5

Introduction:

1. A sense of right and wrong is one of the marks of God's image in man, and the distortion of it is one of the marks of man's fall!
2. What ought to be an instrument of righteousness in our lives is too often the display of self-righteousness!

I. The Character of Judgmentalism, v. 1a

- A. This command cannot mean that we are not to practice the kind of discernment that requires we draw conclusions about issues and people.

1. The immediate context contains commands which actually require that proper judgment be exercised—we must be able to identify “dogs” and “swine” (v. 6) as well as “false prophets” (v. 15). If we know false prophets “by their fruits” (v. 16), that means that we judge that fruit regarding its character, i.e., what kind of fruit is it?
2. As recorded in John 7:24, the Lord said, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” So, He positively stated that there is a kind of judgment which is righteous. Not all judging is sinful.
3. The Apostle Paul actually told the believers in the church at Corinth to judge a professing believer who was living in open sin, 1 Cor 5:12-13.
4. Believers also have an obligation to pass judgment on spiritual claims, 1 Cor 10:15; 14:29; cf. 1 Ths 5:21-22.

- B. This command rules out the self-righteous attitude that passes judgment on others without mercy.

1. The historical setting helps understand the kind of judging that the Lord condemns and prohibits here. The backdrop for much of His teaching throughout this sermon has been the opposition of the religious leaders of His day, particularly the Pharisees (cf. 5:20; 6:1, 5, 16). His teaching about righteousness stands in contrast to these men and their approach to righteousness. The Gospels present plenty of evidence that these men were self-righteous in their assessments of others. In fact, John 7:24 is directed at them—it was these people that were judging “according to appearance” rather than according to righteousness. Likewise, in John 8:15 the Lord told them that they “judge according to the flesh.”
2. The immediate context also makes it clear that the kind of judging which the Lord forbids is the kind that flows from self-righteousness. We'll look at it more carefully in a minute, but vv. 1-2 suggest a person who believes he is above judgment. That is, he feels free to judge others because he himself is immune to judgment. He thinks he can sit in God's judgment seat and pass judgments as if he is God. This is the point of James 4:11-12, “Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. ¹²There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?”
3. Further, a companion of self-righteousness is a stingy spirit regarding mercy—since the self-righteous person doesn't think he needs mercy, he tends not to show mercy. The judgment being exercised here is the kind that condemns over a fault less significant than one's own personal sin. In this sense, the command here is closely related to the Lord's teaching about mercy and forgiveness in 5:7; 6:14-15; and 18:23 ff.

4. R. T. France captures the heart of it well: “This passage, however, is concerned with the fault-finding, condemnatory attitude which is too often combined with a blindness to one’s own failings” (*Matthew*, TNTC, p. 142).

II. The Consequences of Judgmentalism, vv. 1b-4

A. Judgmentalism Invites Judgment, vv. 1-2

1. Those who are judgmental will be judged by God, v. 1b.
 - a. Although the text does not state it explicitly, most take the phrase “you will not be judged” as a reference to God’s judgment, not man’s. It is a characteristic of Matthew’s to refer to God in this. The point, then, is that a judgmental spirit brings judgment from God.
 - b. The basis for this is something I’ve already mentioned. The root of a judgmental spirit is a heart which is self-righteous and without mercy. God will judge that kind of heart. For an idea of God’s perspective on it, consider how the Lord Jesus responded to it in Matthew 23. The force of His rebuke is absolutely stunning.
 - c. Since we are all sinners deserving of condemnation, our stance toward others must include some recognition of our own sin. If we judge, and we must at times, it must be from the stance of one who recognizes his own sinfulness (cf. Gal 6:1).
2. Those who are judgmental are guilty before God, v. 2.
 - a. The language of this verse focuses on the standard of judgment used. It borrows from the language of commerce that aimed at an equitable measuring system—the same one should be used for delivery of goods and of payment. In this case, the standard by which judgment is passed on another becomes the standard by which one will be judged. “The very act of judgment establishes a set of criteria to which the one judging must expect to answer (in relation to one’s own conduct) before God; and the suggestion is that it creates a set of criteria in relation to which it were better that one did not ask to be judged” (Nolland, p. 319).
 - b. To pass judgment presupposes knowledge of the standard by which judgment is made, and knowledge of that standard brings greater accountability for it (cf. James 3:1).
 - c. The implication of the Lord’s words are the same as Paul’s in Romans 2:1-3, “Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. ²And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. ³But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?”

B. Judgmentalism Reveals Hypocrisy, vv. 3-5

The Lord confronted one kind of hypocrisy earlier in the sermon (6:1-18). That kind of hypocrisy gives a false impression about its true motives—they weren’t giving, praying, and fasting out of love for God, but to be seen by people. Here, the hypocrisy is demonstrated by a sham concern about both sin and the spiritual well-being of others.

1. It’s hypocrisy because of its phony concern about sin, v. 3.
 - a. The Lord uses picturesque language that is intended to be shocking by virtue of its exaggeration.

- i. The word for *speck* is probably intended to communicate smallness—it could be something as large as piece of straw, but in light of the contrast it probably refers to something like dust or speck or splinter.
 - ii. In contrast to the *speck* is a *log*—the word refers to “a plank of wood such as is used in a weight-bearing capacity in construction” (Nolland, p. 320).
- b. The idea of someone having a construction beam sticking out of their eye without seeing it communicates the glaring blindness to one’s own faults. That the same person is able to see a speck in someone else’s eye reveals that person’s blindness to be a willful self-deception.
- c. Here’s the heart of the hypocrisy: judgmental people appear to be concerned about holiness and sin, but the failure to see their own sin reveals that they really aren’t concerned about sin at all. If they were really concerned about sin, they’d see it in themselves. They’re selective and distorted vision reveals the hypocrisy of their concern.

2. It’s hypocrisy because of its phony interest in others, v. 4.

- a. Building off the point of v. 3, verse 4 exposes the insincerity of the judgmental person’s interest in helping others with their sin. Seeking to help someone, if genuine, most flow from a real commitment to holiness. If you aren’t interested in dealing with your own sin, then you aren’t really interested in dealing the *sin* of others. You really want to show that you are superior to that person by means of pointing out their inferiority!
- b. One of the saddest and most disgusting displays of hypocrisy is the faux interest that judgmental people display in the spiritual health of others. The piety drips from their lips, but does not reside in their hearts. If they are not serious about their own sin, then their “desire” to help really masks an arrogant desire to show that they are better than other people.

III. The Cure for Judgmentalism, v. 5

A. An Important Clarification: It is not wrong to see faults and seek to correct them!

- 1. It would be wrong to conclude from this passage that the Lord wants us to overlook the sinful faults of spiritual family (*brother’s eye*) or that we should never seek to correct those who need it. That’s not the point of this text, and the Lord’s teaching in other places makes it clear that He expected believers to serve each other in this way (cf. 18:15 “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private;” Luke 17:3 “Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him”).
- 2. God’s plan for the spiritual growth of all believers involves the accountability that comes within the context of loving relationships in the local church, cf. Heb 3:13; 10:24-25; Rom 15:14.

B. An Essential Condition: Deal with your own sin first, then you can help others!

- 1. Before we attempt to deal with the sins of others, we must be serious about dealing with our own sins!

Engaging in careful self-examination, Ps 139:23-24. Maintaining humble approachability, Proverbs 9:8 “Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you, Reprove a wise man and he will love you.” Guarding against deadly self-confidence, cf. 1 Cor 10:12; Gal 6:1.

2. How can we fight the sin of judgmentalism?

See yourself as being judged, not as the Judge! Apply the Golden Rule to your assessments (cf. v. 12). Reflect on your own sin and failures more than the sin and failures of other people! Study what the Bible says about the depth and nature of your own depravity. Open your eyes to the seriousness of your self-centeredness. Meditate constantly on the mercy that has come to you through Jesus Christ, and the costliness of that mercy.

Dogs and Hogs

Matthew 7:6

Introduction:

1. Judgmentalism is a real problem in this world, and, sadly, even among those who profess faith in Jesus Christ. It invites God's judgment and reveals our own hypocrisy. It's a sin that we must do constant battle with in our own hearts!
2. But in fighting that battle we can't afford to throw out all judgment, because God expects us to engage in the proper kinds of judging—to judge righteous judgment.
3. This text addresses the right kind of judgment—think about the 5 to 1 ratio!

I. Explanation

A. The Parts of the Proverb

1. Something sacred and valuable—"what is holy" and "pearls" serve to highlight things that are sacred and valuable. It is not precisely clear what specifically these refer to in this text, but most identify it with the proclamation of truth. In the immediate context it would be the message of the kingdom, but in the larger frame it would be the gospel or God's Word.
2. Something profane and unclean—unlike our day, dogs were not mainly a household pet, but a scavenger that ran the streets eating whatever it could find. According to the Mosaic law, pigs were unclean animals.
 - a. This text and one other in the Bible combine reference to dogs and pigs. 2 Peter 2:22 says, "It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT,' and, 'A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.'"
 - b. The use of these images is in direct contrast to *holy* and *pearls*. The point isn't to define the characteristics of dogs and pigs; it is to show the incompatibility between holy things and dogs, pearls and pigs.
3. Something is trampled and torn—this last part of the verse probably completes a chiasmus which means the trampling is done by the swine and the tearing is done by the dogs.
 - a. Holy---dogs---tear you to pieces
 - b. Pearls---pigs---trample them under foot

B. The Point of the Proverb

1. The point in this proverb is built off of the contrast between the respective parts. That contrast focuses on sacred and valuable things being given to those which have no appreciation for them. Dogs cannot tell the difference between garbage and holy things. Pigs have no appreciation for pearls over peas.
2. If *what is holy* and *pearls* are representative of God's truth, then the point has something to do with not giving God's truth to those who have no appreciation for it.
3. God's messengers must evaluate their hearers so that they do not dishonor God's Word and endanger themselves.
 - a. This is what the Lord Himself did, Matt 11:20-27; 12:38-45; 15:14;
 - b. This is what He taught His disciples to do, Matt 10:14-15

- c. This is how Paul conducted His missionary ministry, Acts 13:46-47; 18:5-6; 28:25-28.
- d. This is what Paul told Titus to do in Crete, Titus 3:10-11.

II. Argumentation

- A. How can we make this kind of judgment? We don't have the right to write somebody off, do we?
 - 1. Let me turn this around a bit—do we have the right to disobey God in this matter?
 - 2. To not do what the Lord commands us to do in this text is to honor people above God! If we aid in having what is holy and valuable trampled underfoot, then we give greater honor to lost people than we do to God. We care more about them than God's truth.
 - 3. The fact is, though, that we aren't really making the judgment in this matter—they are. They have judged themselves unworthy of eternal life (Acts 13:46) and have condemned themselves (Titus 3:11).
- B. How does this fit with our responsibility to be “kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged,”²⁵ with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition” (2 Tim 2:24-25)?
 - 1. It does not conflict with it. Our disposition toward all people should be just like this, i.e., kind, patient, and gently correcting those who are in opposition.
 - 2. But, there can come a time when their opposition is so clear and definite that they refuse to listen genuinely, and, at that point, I believe we are called to honor the principle in this text.
 - 3. There is something of a parallel in the matter of church discipline. Matthew 18:15-17 ties the escalating seriousness of the matter to the response of the one who is in sin. At any point, genuine repentance stops the process from moving forward. Refusing to repent, though, pushes things forward. In that passage, the key idea is expressed with the word “listens.” If the sinning person listens, you've gained your brother. If he refuses to listen, then you move toward discipline.
 - 4. Drawing the parallel, I believe that we make an assessment based on whether the person is still listening. Once it is clear that he or she is no longer listening, then we need to move on.
- C. What does this mean for the contemporary ministry approach that practically adopts profane methods for reaching people like this?
 - 1. I believe a legitimate implication of this truth is that we must not profane holy things in order to reach people for Christ. If we can't give holy things to dogs, then we certainly can't treat holy things like they belong to dogs.
 - 2. Some incredibly bizarre things have been and are being done in the name of reaching people for Christ. Believers who have been called out of darkness are embracing elements of that darkness in order to be relevant or culturally engaged.
 - 3. There needs to be a fresh hearing of Paul's warning to the Ephesians: “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.⁷ Therefore do not be partakers with them; ⁸for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light” (5:6-8).
- D. What does this suggest to the rebellious about the danger of putting off the gospel to the time of their choosing?
 - 1. There is a warning in this verse for those who think they can put off God's call to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. God is not obligated to be merciful to you forever. He's extended an offer of eternal life to you, and you'd better hear and heed it before the day of opportunity passes.
 - 2. If you believe that you can come to Christ at any time of your own choosing, then you deceive yourself on at least two fronts: (a) that you completely control your life—you don't know when you will no longer

the life and breath necessary to call on the Lord's name!; (b) that God will not give you over to your rebellion and rejection—you will be without hope as a dog or hog!

III. Applications

- A. God's glory must always control the proclamation process—His Word is holy and we have no right to profane it or treat it as profane!
 - 1. The contemporary mindset that views God like some jilted lover who is desperately begging lost people to love Him back dishonors God. He is a King who has prepared a banquet and invites all to come, but will not be treated with contempt by those He has invited, cf. Matt 22:1-13.
 - a. He prepares and invites, but contempt for Him is met with severe judgment, vv. 1-10.
 - b. He calls people into His banquet, but those who dishonor Him are cast out, vv. 11-13.
 - 2. The gospel is about God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ and any method which demeans or dishonors that is not worthy of God and is no good for the souls of people!
- B. We must be bold, patient, compassionate, and constant in communicating God's truth, but once rejection is clear and definite, we must move on.
 - 1. Please don't mistake what I am saying as an excuse for not speaking the truth or for giving it out once then moving on. Not at all. We must speak boldly. We must be patient—the harvest comes after times of sowing and cultivating. We must have compassion for their lost condition. We should communicate the truth again and again and again to those who are listening.
 - 2. For the sake, though, of obedience to God and the good of others who need the gospel, there comes a time when we must move on.
 - 3. We should continue to live righteously and beneficially in front of them, but we must turn our attention to those who have ears to hear the gospel.
- C. The truth in this text implies...
 - 1. Our chief duty is faithfulness to God and His Word, not fruitfulness.
 - 2. We must be wise about the time, place, and audience for our message—we should look for receptivity.
 - 3. We should not try to argue someone into faith and we cannot change anyone, so we must proclaim the truth and trust God to convert souls.

Conclusion:

- 1. Are you trusting in Jesus Christ alone for your deliverance from God's wrath and acceptance into His presence?
- 2. Are you telling others about the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ?
- 3. Is it possible that you lowered the gospel down to man's level in a way that dishonors both the gospel and God?

Asking and Trusting

Matthew 7:7-11

Introduction:

1. One of the unique and compelling features of the Sermon on the Mount is the emphasis on God as a heavenly father. For instance, in the psalms God is referred to as father only three times. Two of those are more specific than how we would use it—one in which He is described as the father of the fatherless (Ps 68:5) and one which records the words of the King/Messiah (Ps 89:26). The other time it is used as a comparison, not as a title, “Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him” (Ps 103:13).
2. The point is simply that we have become very accustomed to this language, but it was a unique emphasis of the Lord. And it held special significance for prayer.
3. The Lord turns again to the matter of prayer in 7:7-11. He tells us to pray and then offers motivations for prayer.

I. The Manner of Prayer, v. 7

A. Prayer as Petition, “ask...seek...knock”

1. No reason to see a distinction between these three words. They combine to present one image from different angles.
2. The context isn't specific about what is being asked for, so we need to be careful in narrowing the scope of this text.
 - a. Some tie it almost exclusively to the spiritual graces which the Sermon has called for in disciples.
 - b. Some tie it to the items listed at the end of chapter six (food, clothing).
 - c. It seems best to leave it as a general principle of prayer—one important element of prayer is the matter of asking God for what we need, seeking the blessings we need from His hand, and knocking at heaven's door for the gifts that we need.
3. God has ordained petitionary prayer as a means by which He is glorified, we grow spiritually, and our needs are met.
 - a. God is glorified by our recognition of His all-sufficiency (Heb 11:6).
 - b. We grow spiritually as we humbly acknowledge our dependence and turn to God in His fullness (Ps 116:1-2 “I love the LORD, because He hears My voice and my supplications. ²Because He has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I shall call upon Him as long as I live.”
 - c. Our needs are met by His gracious provision and care for us (Phil 4:19).

B. Prayer as Pattern, “asking...seeking...knocking”

1. The original language presents these as present tense verbs which stress the continual nature of the praying—it is the constant pattern of the believer's life.
2. A proper relationship to God, according to the Bible, is one of constant awareness of His presence, dependence on His grace, and desire to see His work advance. Prayer is an essential component of maintaining this perspective.
 - a. If we don't talk to God, we act as if He is not near us.
 - b. If we recognize our own limitations and weakness, we will constantly be expressing our desire for God to strengthen and help us.
 - c. If we see things in relationship to God's purposes, we will constantly be asking Him to work for His glory in the circumstances, both large and small, of our lives.

II. The Motivations for Prayer, vv. 8-11

A. The Nature of Prayer: It is effective! (v. 8)

1. It's clear from the relationship between vv. 7 and 8 that this verse is intended to give a reason for asking, seeking, and knocking. And it's the most basic motivation of all: prayer is that it is the God-ordained means for obtaining what we need for life and godliness. The language of verse 8 beautifully underscores this: "receives...finds...will be opened."
2. Here is an open, expansive invitation from the Lord to ask God for what we need because God hears prayer.
3. The Bible is loaded with promises that God answers prayer.
4. The Bible is clear that we do not ask enough.
5. We should ask, seek, and knock because God hears and answers prayer!

B. The Nature of God: He is good and generous! (vv. 9-11)

1. Verses 9-11 provide a second reason why we should constantly ask God to supply for our needs. The use of "Or" at the beginning of the verse shows us that it is continuing the line of argument started in v. 8.
2. These verses establish a point by way of comparison between earthly fathers and our Father who is in heaven.
 - a. The questions of vv. 9-10 simply show that the normal pattern for parents is to do what is best for a child, not deceive or harm that child.
 - b. The key is at the beginning of v. 10. The Lord makes a statement which is blunt, but helps set the contrast: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more..."
 - i. Jesus assumes the depravity of humans, with the exception of Himself.
 - ii. Jesus recognizes the work of common grace which enables familial love.
 - iii. If depraved parents do good for their children, then certainly a holy, good God will do even more for His children.
3. God's good and generous nature is another motivation for petitionary prayer, "give what is good to those who ask Him!"
 - a. Notice the connection repeated again between *giving* and *asking* (5xs in these verses).
 - b. The gift is described as "what is good" and is left as open as the asking.
 - c. God has committed Himself to the good of His people, cf. Rom 8:28; Ps 84:11 "For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly."

Conclusion:

1. This is an incredible prayer promise: ask and it will be given! But you may be objecting right now: "I asked and God didn't give it to me!"
 - a. To whom this promise is made:
 - i. Children of the Heavenly Father, v. 11.
 - ii. Children who seek their Father's will, cf. 6:10.
 - b. For what is this promise made:
 - i. "What is good" clearly eliminates some things.
 - ii. "What is good" is best determined by God!
2. Focus: Christ's disciples should continually express their dependence on God by asking God for what they need, trusting that He will give it if it is good for us.

The Golden Rule and the Narrow Gate

Matthew 7:12-14

Introduction:

- 1) Sermon comes toward the end and the Lord summarizes and concludes.
- 2) True righteousness and genuine repentance!

I. The Summary of True Righteousness, v. 12

A. Its Comprehensiveness, “In everything...for this is the Law and the Prophets”

1. Because of Its Applicability, “in everything”

- The nature of the Lord's instruction (and all moral instruction) is that it can't cover every imaginable circumstance with detailed specifics and cases. The answer to this is to establish moral principles that can be applied to other similar circumstances.
- Some principles, however, are so transcendent that they cover all cases—here's one of those. This principle should govern all human relationships.

2. Because of Its Nature, “for this is...”

- Practically, what the Lord is saying here is that the specifics of the Law and Prophets are details of this principle, i.e., specific case applications of this principle.
- Interestingly, the Lord uses the same kind of summarizing statement about the second great commandment in Matthew 22:39-40 (cf. Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14).
 - Don't conclude that these general principles invalidate the specific details of God's commands. That's not the point. The point is to show the broader applicability of the moral principle. It applies to more than just the specific commands.
- This means that the Golden Rule is a restatement of the Second Great Commandment, i.e., to love your neighbor as yourself means that you will “treat people the same way you want them to treat you”

B. Its Character

1. This should not to be viewed as teaching the pursuit of good karma or adopting the “pay it forward” approach to good deeds.

- a. While many ethical teachers through the centuries have taught similar things, and some of them were basing it in what we would call enlightened self-interest; that is not the point here.
- b. The context for this summary is the entire sermon's instruction on righteousness. The standard for the rest of what the Lord taught is righteousness as God sees and demands it, not what works best for the person. In fact, at points the Lord's teaching seems to run directly contrary to this kind of self-interest (cf. 5:38 ff).

2. This summary sets the standards for ethics both negatively and positively:

- a. The form of the rule taught by the Lord is different than many forms of it in ancient writings and teachings. Generally, it is stated only negatively, i.e., don't do to others what you don't want done to yourself. By stating it positively, the Lord retains the negative effect while emphasizing an moral obligation for His disciples.

- b. Viewed negatively, it prohibits selfish exploitation—we can't do to others what we wouldn't want done to ourselves!
 - 1) In this way, the rule serves a negative function—it helps us understand how we should not think, speak, and act toward other people.
 - 2) So, if you don't like being gossiped about, then don't gossip; if you don't like being stolen from, then don't steal; if you don't like being hated, then don't hate; if you don't like being taken advantage of, then don't take advantage of other people.
- c. Viewed positively, it promotes selfless service—we are to do for others what we would want done for ourselves!
 - 1) The positive side of the equation actually lays a responsibility on us to do the good for others that we would desire for ourselves.
 - 2) So, if you want to be loved, then love; if you would like to receive help when it's needed, then give help when it's needed; if you would like to be forgiven when repentant, then forgive others; if you would like to be accepted, then be accepting.

Focus: Do the good for others you desire for yourself!

II. The Call to Genuine Repentance, vv. 13-14

- A. The Command: Commit to Discipleship! "Enter through the narrow gate"
- B. The Reasons

1. Two Gates and Two Ways, "gate is wide... way is broad...gate is small...way is narrow"

- a. The Wide Gate and Broad Way—emphasis is on the visibility, accessibility, and ease of this gate and path. A wide gate is easily seen and passed through; a wide path is easily followed.
- b. The Small Gate and Narrow Way—emphasis is on the need to find, go through the gate, and continue on the path.
 - 1) Because the gate is not large, it is not seen as easily as the wide gate, so one must look for it. The point, I believe, is that one cannot assume that he is passing through the correct gate. There must be deliberate attention to the gate that is chosen.
 - 2) The word chosen for "narrow" in v. 14 is different from the one used in v. 14 about the gate. It really emphasizes the difficulty of the path—it is a constricted path. Following Christ will lead to persecution and afflictions, and only genuine believers will stay on that path (cf. 13:20).
 - 3) Point of emphasis is that the call to discipleship demands surrender to Christ, the kind of surrender that goes against the flow of humanity, religion, and leads to difficulty and trials.

2. Two Final Destinations, "destruction...life"

- a. Destruction means ultimate judgment from God, cf. v. 23 "depart from Me."
- b. Life is eternal life, cf. v. 21 "enter the kingdom of heaven"

3. Two Crowds, "many...few"

- a. The point is not to create a discussion about the relative number of folks who will be saved—this text uses "few" while 20:28 uses "many." Compared to the number who rejects God and

Christ's call to discipleship, the number is few. Viewed on its own, though, the number is many.

- b. In a day like ours, this statement helps us remember that:
 - 1) The way is not settled by majority opinion, cf. Exo 23:2 "you shall not follow the masses in doing evil"
 - 2) The way is not determined by each person, cf. Pro 14:12 "There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death."

Conclusion:

- 1) The sermon has been about true righteousness and genuine repentance—with the key being those words *true* and *genuine*. The Lord was preaching to a people who were familiar with righteousness and repentance. There were plenty of imitations around, so the Lord clears away the false from the true.
- 2) True righteousness is marked by doing the good for others that one desires for himself. Genuine repentance is marked by committing to Jesus Christ regardless of the cost.
- 3) Here's a real problem—neither of these are in the hearts of fallen people! A sinful heart cannot generate genuine repentance and true righteousness. Can't happen. That's why Jesus told a religious man, Nicodemus, that he must be born again!
 - a. It's the work of God, not man.
 - b. It's evidenced by faith in Jesus Christ as the only One who can save you from the sin which condemns you. Turn and trust!

How to Spot a False Prophet

Matthew 7:15-23

Introduction:

1. There is a wide gate and broad way that leads to destruction, and there is a small gate and narrow way that leads to life. It is eternally important that one pass through the right gate and get on the right road!
2. This is complicated by the fact that there are many false teachers in this world you are pointing people through the wrong gate and down the wrong road.
3. The Bible is clear about the danger of naively trusting all who claim to speak on behalf of God. We must be careful not to become cynical, but we also cannot afford to be gullible.
4. The best route is to have God's Word instruct us about the standards by which we are to make judgments regarding the difference between true and false teachers. That's precisely what the Lord does in Matthew 7:15-23.

I. The Topic: How to Spot a False Prophet

- Proof: "Beware" (v. 15); "you will know" (v. 16a, 20); good vs. bad fruit imagery (vv. 16-19)
- This instruction is needed because of the false claims and impressions given by false prophets (vv. 15b, 21 ff).
- The connection between the idea of false prophets (v. 15) and the claim of those described in vv. 21-22 show that this is one unit.
- The problem of *false prophets* is addressed in both testaments. OT: Deut 13:1-5; Jer 23:9-32. NT: 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 4:1-3; Rev 2:20. The Lord speaks directly about it Matthew 24:11, 24 also. Without using the title *false prophet* the same problem is also dealt with in 1 Tim 4:1-5; 2 Tim 4:2-4; and Acts 20:29-30 even uses the *wolves* imagery.
- Putting it simply, these are *false* prophets because they are not God's prophets! Whether motivated by selfish desires like greed, intellectual pride, or the desire for popularity (Rom 16:18; 1 Tim 6:20-21; 2 Tim 4:2-4), or by Satanic deception (1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Cor 11:13-15), the fact is that they are dangerous to God's people and work.

II. The Test: Fruit Inspection ("you will know them by their fruits")

A. The Kind of Fruit Reveals the Kind of Tree, v. 16

- The point is simple: there is a direct connection between the fruit and the tree, so examining the fruit reveals the kind of tree.
- A false prophet will produce the fruit of a false prophet.

B. The Quality of the Fruit Reveals the Character of the Tree, vv. 17-18

The preceding point leads to this one. It is not enough to know what kind of tree, but also whether that tree is good or not.

1. A Simple Reality: Good trees bear good fruit; bad trees bear bad fruit (v. 17).

If the fruit is bad, it's because the tree is bad. If the tree is good, it will bear good fruit. We might want to qualify this or make excuses to get around it, but the Lord sets it out as a simple reality that governs the inspection of the tree and fruit.

2. A Practical/Moral Necessity, v. 18

In terms of the Lord's point, the reality is grounded in a practical or moral necessity—there's a direct connection between the character of the tree and the quality of the fruit. Good trees cannot produce bad fruit and bad trees cannot produce good fruit.

C. The Quality of the Fruit Confirms the Destiny of the Tree, v. 19

The absence of “good fruit” not only reveals the character of the tree, but also confirms its destiny—judgment. The language here (“is cut down and thrown into the fire”) is the same as 3:10. Verse 23 makes it clear that this means removal from the Lord's presence (“depart from Me”), or, to state it in terms of v. 21, they will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

What is good fruit? (something observable [vs. claim] which reflects the root)

1. It can't be ministerial success, cf. v. 22.

- a. The works that are performed by these false prophets appear to be ministerial success—prophesying, casting out demons, performing miracles. This probably constitutes the “sheep's clothing” of v. 15.
- b. All of these things may find their source in counterfeit activity by demons or humans (cf. Acts 19:13-16; Rev 13:13-14).
- c. The devil counterfeits in order to deceive and lead people away from God and His truth. False prophets counterfeit and deceive in order to serve themselves by exploiting others, cf. “ravenous wolves” (v. 15); “such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites” (Rom 16:18); “whose god is their appetite” (Phil 3:19).
- d. Contrary to what we sometimes hear, God does at times use unregenerate people to further His own purposes, often in spite of their own evil desires and plans. God honors His Word even in the mouth of apostates and charlatans. Judas probably serves as the poster boy for what we find in this passage!

2. It is conformity or obedience to the Father's will, v. 21.

- a. Bad = practicing lawlessness; willful disobedience to God's will.
- b. 12:33-37 – words; 3:8—works; so creed and conduct

3. It is the evidence of genuine conversion and spiritual transformation, vv. 15, 23.

- a. N.B. the contrast between sheep and wolves in v. 15. Those are truly sheep evidence their true character by following the Great Shepherd!
- b. The Lord's answer to these false prophets reveals that they were never truly converted. He says, “I never knew you.” These are not followers of Christ who fall away. They are pretenders—wolves in sheep's clothing—that never had a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

4. False prophets are revealed by the fruit of their refusal to submit to God's will.

Applications:

1. Service for Christ (ministerial success) does not justify or compensate for disobedience in the ministry, your life, or others.
 - a. We should long to see God's work prosper!

- b. Since we are not the source of this prosperity, it is not a proper means of evaluation (cf. “you will know”)
 - c. God has often used unfit, unworthy tools—Cyrus, Samson, Judas, Balaam. Al Collins recently told me about a man who found out that the person who led him to Christ no longer believes in God!
 - d. Rick Warren’s advice to “never criticize any method that God is blessing” is dead wrong.
- 2. Since “good fruit” flows from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ which produces a heart for God’s righteousness that results in obedience to God’s will, your greatest concern and first priority must be your personal pursuit of God and godliness.
 - a. Walk precedes work and produces work.
 - b. God isn’t dependent on us; He is, if you are Christ’s, making you into Christ’s image and using you to glorify Himself.
- 3. The *mere profession* of discipleship is no shield from condemnation in the day of judgment.
 - a. There is a coming day of judgment, “on that day” (v. 22).
 - b. The Judge will be Jesus Christ, “say to Me on that day...I will declare to them” (vv. 22a, 23a).
- 4. Genuine repentance results in submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, not just the profession of it. True righteousness is displayed in real obedience to the Father’s will, not in superficial displays of service for Christ.

The Danger of Ignoring Jesus Christ

Matthew 7:24-29

Introduction:

1. We come to the end of the Sermon on the Mount, and it's taken us 25 sermons to cover chapters 5-7. I draw consolation from the fact that the great British preacher David Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached through this same section in 60 sermons!
2. This section of Scripture is vitally important because of its character as a concentrated location for the Lord's teaching, but also for the place that it has in Matthew's gospel. In the first sermon on this great Sermon, I said that the purpose of this sermon was "to announce the nature of true repentance and the true righteousness which marks the kingdom which Jesus is proclaiming. By doing this, Jesus establishes His authority as the King. By recording this, Matthew begins the path toward the King's rejection."
3. The conclusion of the Sermon clearly drives home the authoritative claim of Jesus to be the King and to demand that all acknowledge this through genuine repentance that leads to true righteousness. There are two ways, two kinds of fruit, which lead to and meet with two very different results.
4. The last six verses of the Sermon make it absolutely clear that no one can afford to ignore the teaching and claims of Jesus Christ! (Why can't His teaching be ignored?)

I. Because of Its Consequences, vv. 24-27

A. The Parable

1. This parable reveals the difference between a baseless profession and one that will pass the test. In this regard, it is closely connected to what precedes it (cf. "Therefore" in v. 24).
2. The details of the parable:
 - a. The house is a person's profession or claim of salvation, cf. "Many will say to Me on that day" (v. 22).
 - b. The foundation is what that profession or claim is based on. Since the foundation is crucial to the stability of the house, the Lord focuses their attention on two different kinds of foundations.
 - c. The house founded "on the rock" is a profession that is based on hearing and acting on Christ's words, cf. "everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them" (v. 24).
 - d. The house founded "on the sand" is a profession that is based on only hearing Christ's words, not acting on them, cf. "everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them" (v. 26).
 - e. Being wise or foolish here is determined by whether one has a profession with a solid foundation or a baseless one.

B. The Point:

1. Genuine repentance and faith act on Christ's words not merely agree with or admire them.
 - a. I use "agree" here is a purely intellectual, mental sense, i.e., someone hears the teaching of Christ and does not object to it, but fails to obey it.
 - b. I use "admire" to show the difference between being interested in what the Lord taught in a philosophical, theoretical way, and being committed to it as the word of one's Master.
 - c. Genuine repentance and faith involve the entire person (mind, emotion, and will).
2. The only profession that passes the test is one that is joined to the obedience of faith.

- a. This was the problem in vv. 21-23—they claimed to know the Lord, but they really didn't. Those who “practice lawlessness” reveal that they were never truly converted.
- b. Remember, the Lord's message was “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (4:17). Genuine repentance never leaves a person unchanged.

C. The Proof

- 1. Does this mean that our obedience is the basis for our salvation? No, not at all.
 - a. Remember, the focus is on one's profession or claim of discipleship (vv. 21-23).
 - b. What's at stake is telling the difference between a true and false profession; what is the difference between true vs. false claim of being the Lord's disciple.
 - c. The difference between true faith and phony faith is the transforming power of saving faith. Genuine faith hears and does.
- 2. We must keep the relationship between faith and obedience right. Genuine faith leads to obedience. We obey because we believe.

II. Because of His Authority, vv. 28-29

Matthew records the crowd's response to the Lord's teaching—it is amazement. Specifically, they are amazed at His teaching.

A. The Character of His Authority, “teaching them as one having authority”

- 1. The word “teaching” here could refer to the *content* of His teaching or to the *communication* of that content. Probably, it captures both. This sermon has demonstrated the Lord's willingness to articulate both fresh revelation of God's expectations and to do so in a commanding way.
 - a. Fresh—“you have heard it said, but I say to you”
 - b. Commanding—“these words of Mine” and “say to Me on that day”
- 2. There is no doubt that Jesus was presenting Himself as a King with the right to claim allegiance and obedience.

B. The Contrast to His Authority, “not as their scribes”

- 1. Most take this as a reference to the tendency for the scribes to fill their teaching with the thoughts and words of earlier teachers. In other words, they based their authority on the authority of expert opinion that had preceded them.
- 2. It is very easy to lose the authority of the biblical text is the examination of interpretations and ideas about the text, and this seems to have dominated their teaching.
- 3. The Lord, on the other hand, spoke directly and clearly, and He didn't appeal to authorities to establish His own. He was taking His stand as the One sent from the Father to declare God's will for all men. He must be heard and obeyed!
- 4. While none of us can speak exactly like the Lord did, we must resist the growing tendency to give up the authority of God's Word.
 - a. Some of this is rooted in a loss of confidence in the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures. How can one speak authoritatively if he isn't sure that he has an authoritative word?

- b. Some are developing a false humility that makes a tragic mistake in thinking that humility about ourselves somehow shows itself by being less dogmatic about what God has said. I should always be humble, but my humility can't betray God's authority.
- 5. We must be bold with the message
 - a. The message of Christ is authoritative!
 - b. We have been commissioned on the basis of Christ's authority!
 - c. To the degree that we re-state Christ's words, we have authority and must speak authoritatively!

Conclusion: If you were sitting on that Galilean hillside hearing the Lord Jesus preach this sermon, this would be His word to you—is your house built on the rock or on the sand?