

The Church of the Servant King

Home Bible Study

Survey of the Bible Series

The Gospel of Matthew

(Lesson SB-5)

Matthew Chapter 5

Chapter 4 closes with Jesus calling out Peter, Andrew, James, and John to be His disciples. In addition, Matthew mentions the beginning of Jesus' public ministry with the various miracles that attended it. Finally, there are two references to the kingdom (verses 17 & 23) and one of the references is to the "gospel of the kingdom" (verse 23).

The *gospel of the kingdom* is the good news that God would set up on the earth a kingdom in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7:16). This kingdom would be at the same time political, spiritual, Israelitish, and universal over which God's Son, David's heir, would be King and which, according to later revelation to John, would last for 1000 years. Two preachings of this gospel are mentioned in the Bible. The first preaching was in the past with the ministry of John the Baptist, continuing with our Lord and His disciples, and ending with the Jewish rejection of the King. The other is yet future (Matt 24:14) during the tribulation and immediately preceding the coming of the King in glory.

Many times an objection is raised by those who do not wish to see a distinction between this gospel of the Kingdom preached by John the Baptist, Jesus, and His disciples and the gospel of grace preached during this Church Age. Yet, a failure to distinguish between the two gives rise to many problems not the least of which is a confusion of much of the teaching in the gospels relating to the future kingdom with the principles that relate to the present age of the Church. In addition, it is difficult to conceive of men preaching a gospel that is based upon the death and resurrection of Christ when they did not believe Christ would die or be raised again (Luke 18:31-34).

In Matthew 5-7, we find Jesus' teaching focusing upon the moral laws and spiritual principles that would be in place during the period of the kingdom. In chapters 8-10, we find a succession of miracles and mighty works through which our Lord exhibits His Messianic credentials. In chapters 11, 12 and 13, the reactions of the leaders and people help us to understand that the kingdom has in effect been rejected and in chapter 13, our Lord sums up the results of His preaching.

Matthew 5-7 is commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount. The multitudes are present at the beginning of the Sermon and at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Evidently, Jesus pulled away from the multitudes so that He could instruct His disciples. However, as He taught His disciples, the crowds began to gather around Him and His disciples again.

The Sermon on the Mount was not given as the way of salvation for the lost, but as the way of life for true children of the kingdom. It was instruction for those who had responded to Jesus' invitation to repent. Most likely, the disciples were confused along with the rest of the Jews as to the true nature of righteousness and God's kingdom. In this address, Jesus clarified both the heart of the Law and the nature of true religion in God's kingdom. The Sermon showed how a person who is in right relationship to God should conduct his life. It demonstrates the standards that God requires of His people within the context of a Jewish nation. It is distinctly Jewish, yet due to the fact that certain spiritual truths are common to all dispensations of history, there are similarities with Church Age principles.

Matthew 5:3-12 – The Beatitudes

The only standard of righteousness that the disciples knew was that laid down by the Scribes and Pharisees. However, the standards that Jesus taught in the Beatitudes seemed at variance with what the Jews saw in everyday life in Israel. The Pharisees were concerned with external qualities, but Jesus was teaching on internal matters. The qualities that Jesus mentioned (e.g. poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, etc.) could not be the product of Pharisaic righteousness.

In verse 5, we see an example of that which makes this distinctly Jewish. Jesus' followers who possess these qualities become heirs of the kingdom (vv. 3, 10) on earth (v. 5). Only to the Jewish race is there a promise of a kingdom on earth. Only to the Jewish race is the land a part of their inheritance promised in the Abrahamic, Palestinian, and Davidic Covenants. Anyone possessing these qualities would have stood out in a crowd otherwise looking for a conquering Messiah and kingdom.

The teaching contained in the Beatitudes express a fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-3 and they express both the entrance requirements for the Kingdom and the associated blessings of the Messianic Age. In effect, Jesus is teaching that certain attitudes and behaviors are to characterize those who are to enter the Kingdom that He is offering (4:17, 23). Jesus came to fulfill all of the Law and the Prophets to include Isaiah 61:1-3.

A brief analysis of some of the terms and phrases used in verses 3-12:

- “Blessed” refers to being approved or accepted
- The “poor in spirit” does not refer to those who lack courage, rather it refers to those who have acknowledged their spiritual unworthiness before God and their utter dependence upon him. It refers to those who have acknowledged that by themselves they can achieve nothing including the merit to enter the kingdom.
- In Luke’s account of the Beatitudes (Luke 6:20-26), Luke mentions “the poor” only. Some have tried to make a case that Matthew spiritualized Jesus’ concern for the economically destitute. While there is concern for the economically poor, the emphasis in both the Old and New Testament is upon one’s spiritual status.
- Both the Hebrew and Greek words for poor refer to those who because of material poverty and social distress have confidence only in God (e.g. Psa 37:14; 40:17; 69:28-29, 32-33; Prov 16:19; 29:23; Isa 61:1). [The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Matthew, Mark, Luke, 131] Far from conferring spiritual advantage, wealth and privilege entail great spiritual peril (Matt 6:24; 19:23-24). “The emperor Julian the Apostate (332-63) is reputed to have said with vicious irony that he wanted to confiscate Christians’ property so that they might all become poor and enter the kingdom of heaven. On the other hand, the wealthy too easily dismiss Jesus’ teaching about poverty here and elsewhere (see on 6:24) as merely attitudinal and confuse their hoarding with good stewardship.” [The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Matthew, Mark, Luke, 132]
- Verse 3 and verse 10 form a literary pattern known as an inclusio or envelope whereby everything between relates to the kingdom of heaven. (Note the last phrase in both verses). That which is included in the inclusio is kingdom norms and kingdom blessings.
- Those who “mourn” (v. 4) refers to the spiritual remnant of Jesus’ day who weep because of the humiliation of Israel due to personal and corporate sin. Compare to Psa 119:136 and Ezek 9:4.
- These first two beatitudes deliberately allude to the messianic blessing of Isaiah 61:1-3 and thereby confirm them as eschatological and messianic.
- The “meek” (v. 5) refer to those who are free from malice or a vengeful spirit. It requires that we have such a true view about ourselves (vv. 3 & 4) that it expresses itself even in our attitude toward others.
- The word “inherit” is an allusion to Psa 37:9, 11, 29. This was a Psalm that was recognized as messianic in Jesus’ day.
- To “hunger and thirst” (v. 6) is a vivid expression of desire. Such desire can only be born of knowledge of the object of that desire (Psa 42:1-2; 63).
- To be “merciful” (v. 7) is to be compassionate for the suffering and needy and to forgive others as the situation demands.
- The “pure in heart” (v. 8) refers to those who are without hypocrisy such as existed in the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. The religious leaders emphasized external piety and ceremonial cleanliness, yet Jesus called them hypocrites (e.g. Matt 6:16-18; 23:27-28).
- The “peacemakers” (v. 9) refers to those who proclaim the Gospel. The Gospel in Jesus’ day was the gospel of the Kingdom. Jesus was prophesied to be the Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6-7; 52:7).
- Those who are “persecuted for righteousness’ sake” refer to the persecution that the faithful follower of Christ and proclaimer of the Gospel will face in the midst of a world that has Satan as its ruler (see

John 15:18-25). The Church Age believer who faithfully proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ will also experience persecution (see Acts 14:22; 2 Tim 3:12; 1 Peter 4:13-14).

Matthew 5:13-16 – Believers are Salt and Light

The believing Jew was a part of a distinct nation in God's purpose. The Jewish believer and the Jewish nation were to draw the Gentiles to God through the blessings that God was able to pour out on His people due to their obedience to His laws and ordinances which were designed to set them apart. Their obedience to His laws and ordinances could have only arisen from a heart that loved Him. Salt is not only a preservative, but it also creates a thirst. The Jewish believing nation was to create a thirst on the part of others to know more.

In both the OT and the NT, light symbolizes purity as opposed to filth, truth or knowledge as opposed to error or ignorance, and divine revelation and presence as opposed to reprobation and abandonment by God. The reference to the city on a hill refers to OT prophecies about the time when Jerusalem would be lifted up before the world with the nations streaming to it (Isa 2:2-5; 42, 49, 54, 60).

Matthew 5:17-20 – Christ Fulfills the Law

The righteousness required to enter the kingdom of heaven (the kingdom of God on earth that Jesus offered) was greater than that taught by the Scribes and the Pharisees. Jesus' righteousness was internal not external. Note that in the Kingdom there will be categories of believers based upon proper understanding and application of the commandments of Christ. The one who breaks one of the least of these commandments is not excluded from the kingdom, but takes on a less significant role. The phrase "these commandments" is a reference to the commandments in all of the Old Testament Scriptures. Jesus fulfilled all aspects of the Law and the Prophets (a title used of the Hebrew Scriptures by the Jews in Jesus' day – see 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Luke 24:44). Therefore, if one distorts Jesus' teaching concerning Himself and the manner of life required to glorify Him, that person will suffer loss in the Kingdom.

Matthew 5:21-26 – Murder Begins in the Heart

Raca meant empty head. Jesus is not teaching that someone who calls another Jew Raca will go to eternal punishment. Rather, He is saying that to utter such a statement would place oneself in a worse condition at the time of the judgment. The attitude that will characterize those who enter the kingdom of God on earth will be manifested in a desire to be reconciled with one's fellow believer as much as it was within one's power. The motivation for such behavior would have stemmed from a realization of the undeserved nature of one's reconciliation with God. The Church Age believer finds similar teaching pertinent to this Age in 1 John 3:15.

Matthew 5:27-30 – Adultery in the Heart

Jesus was not teaching physical mutilation, for a blind man could have as much of a problem with lust as could a sighted person. Jesus was advocating the removal of the inward cause of offense. Only through repentance (a change of mind) from the emphasis on the outward obedience to the Law as taught by the religious leaders to an emphasis on the inward condition of the heart would one find the righteousness required to enter the Kingdom. The Church Age believer finds similar teaching in 1 Cor. 6:9-10.

Matthew 5:33-37 – Jesus Forbids Oaths

Jesus is in effect saying that one's life should be sufficient to back up one's words. The religious leaders (Pharisees) were notorious for their oaths, yet they made allowances for relief from the oath by not including God within the basis for the oath.

Matthew 5:38-42 – Go the Extra Mile

The words “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” come from several Old Testament passages (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21). They are called the *lex talionis*, the law of retaliation. This law was given to protect the innocent and to make sure that the retaliation did not occur beyond the offense. Jesus was teaching that while the rights of the innocent were protected by the Law, the righteous need not necessarily claim their rights. A righteous man would go the extra mile to maintain peace and promote reconciliation. Compare this teaching with 2 Corinthians 11:22-33.

Matthew 5:43-48 – Love Your Enemies

The phrase “hate your enemy” is not found in any Hebrew Scripture. Jesus was simply recognizing the presence of certain distortions of OT Scripture such as Lev 19:18 among some of the religious leaders. This view was present within the Qumran community and probably represented the view of other groups with similar positions.

“Perfect” is the Greek word *teleioi* which means mature or holy and when used in reference to people it is referencing an adult, mature status verses a child (*paidion*). See 1 Cor. 14:20 for an exhortation to the Church Age believer in this regard.