



THE LIFE AND TIMES

of

JESUS OF NAZARETH

If You Missed a Week Where We've Been

Come, Follow Me

Twelve Ordinary Men, One Extraordinary Call

1. Jesus called ordinary men into extraordinary service. Christ used them to turn the world upside down.
2. John the Baptist pointed his disciples to Christ: "Behold the Lamb of God." True discipleship begins with seeing Jesus as the fulfillment of redemption and salvation.
3. Andrew brought Peter, Philip brought Nathanael, and Matthew brought sinners. A disciple wants others to "come and see."
4. "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" - transformation under Christ's hand.
5. Discipleship begins with being with Jesus - appointed "that they might be with Him," then sent to preach.
6. The Twelve were real men with real weaknesses and varied backgrounds. Christ formed fishermen, a tax collector, a zealot, doubters, bold men, quiet men, and one tragic betrayer.
7. Bonhoeffer reminds us that discipleship is costly, not casual. "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."





If You Missed a Week Where We've Been *(continued)*



A Late Night Visitor: Nicodemus and the Mystery of the New Birth

1. John 3 centers on Jesus' declaration: "You must be born again." Religion, morality, heritage, and status cannot replace new life received by faith.
2. Nicodemus was respected and religious, yet Jesus exposed his deepest need: sin and the need for spiritual rebirth through faith
3. The new birth is not self-improvement or religious activity. It is the Spirit's sovereign work, producing true faith and fruit.
4. Like the bronze serpent in Numbers 21, Christ was lifted up so sinners may look to God's provision by faith and live.
5. The gospel's heart: God loved, God gave, and whoever believes in the Son has everlasting life.
6. This confronts cultural Christianity. Admiring Jesus is not enough. True Christianity begins with new life - faith, repentance, humility, and Christ-centered living.
7. *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16*

If You Missed a Week Where We've Been *(continued)*

Zeal for His Father's House - Two Cleansings of the Temple - "Can You Hear Me Now?!"

1. Jesus performed His first miracle at Cana, turning shame into joy and revealing His divine glory
2. Mary said, "Whatever He says to you, do it," calling for immediate obedience
3. Jesus then went to Jerusalem, where the Temple, meant for prayer, had become filled with commerce and a *den of thieves*.
4. In zeal for His Father's house, He drove out the merchants and called for restoring the purpose of true worship
5. He declared the Temple to be "a house of prayer for all nations," not a place of profit
6. A second cleansing later in His ministry confirmed His sustained call to repentance and reverence
7. And His message still confronts the Church today. In the midst of programs, polished liturgies, carefully crafted music, and the quiet pull of commercial ambition, Jesus still stands before His people and asks: *Can you hear Me now?*





If You Missed a Week Where We've Been *(continued)*



Waters and Wilderness: Baptism's Blessing and Triumph over Temptation

1. At His baptism, Jesus publicly identified Himself with sinners and began His public ministry in obedience to the Father
2. The heavens opened, the Spirit descended like a dove, and the Father declared, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," providing one of the clearest displays of the Trinity in Scripture
3. Immediately after His baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to face direct confrontation with Satan
4. Satan offered shortcuts to power, glory, and authority without obedience to the will of God
5. Jesus resisted every temptation by relying on the written Word of God, demonstrating faithful obedience where Adam and Israel had failed
6. The wilderness became the setting where the obedient Son showed His readiness to carry out the Father's mission
7. Before the ministry advanced publicly, the Messiah was revealed by God and proven faithful under testing.

If You Missed a Week Where We've Been *(continued)*



A Carpenter's Son in a Cradle: Genealogy, Mary, and Witnesses

1. The birth of Jesus is surrounded by a remarkable series of witnesses placed by God to confirm the identity of the promised Messiah
2. Angels announced the birth of the Savior, declaring peace on earth and glory to God in the highest
3. Shepherds became the first public witnesses of the good news after seeing the child in Bethlehem and spreading the report widely
4. Simeon recognized the infant Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise and praised God for allowing him to see the Lord's salvation
5. Anna, a faithful prophetess who had waited many years for redemption, witnessed openly about the child to all who were looking for deliverance
6. All these witnesses demonstrate that God revealed His Son publicly and through credible testimony, not quietly
7. The early years, including Jesus' growth in wisdom and presence in the temple, show His life unfolding under the hand of providence - *He must be about His Father's business*





If You Missed a Week Where We've Been *(continued)*



Before Bethlehem: The Word Before Worlds

1. John begins his Gospel not with the birth of Jesus, but with the eternal existence of the Word before creation itself
2. The Word is the agent of creation, through whom all things were made and by whom all things continue to exist
3. The term Logos was familiar in the ancient world and especially influenced by Stoic philosophy which spoke of the Logos as a rational principle governing the universe. John reveals that the Logos is not a force, but a living Person, Jesus Christ
4. John uses the language of the culture as a platform and expands it with divine truth, showing that the true source of life, order, and meaning is the Son of God
5. A central theme in John chapter 1 is witness: God sends witnesses to testify publicly to the truth about Christ
6. John the Baptist is a man sent from God to bear witness to the Light so that all might believe
7. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, meaning that the eternal God entered human history as a person.

If You Missed a Week Where We've Been *(continued)*

Prophecy and fulfillment

1. The Old Testament contains a unified pattern of promises and prophetic expectations pointing forward to a coming Messiah who would redeem His people
2. These prophecies described His lineage, birthplace, mission, suffering, and ultimate victory long before He entered human history
3. Jesus Himself taught that the entire Old Testament points to Him, not merely in isolated predictions but in a coherent redemptive storyline
4. After His resurrection, Jesus declared in Luke 24 that everything written in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled concerning Him
5. Christianity is not built on religious sentiment or moral aspiration, but on fulfilled promises anchored in real history
6. The coming of Jesus was not accidental or improvised, it was the unfolding of God's eternal plan in time
7. The Old Testament does not merely anticipate Christ, it testifies of Him.



Mountainside Manifesto: The Sermon That Still Shakes the Soul Matthew 5–7

During this lesson I hope we will not quickly say, “Yes, I know the Sermon on the Mount.” and pass by it too fast. Christ did not preach this sermon simply to furnish us with noble sayings. He preached to pierce and to expose the thin garments of reputation, religious appearance, and outward respectability. This sermon is merciful, but it is not mild. It drills beneath behavior into desire, beneath speech into anger, and beneath profession into true discipleship. And if it unsettles us, then it is doing exactly what Jesus intended: bringing us more fully under His authority and placing our feet more firmly on the rock of His Word.



The Sermon on the Mount has echoed through the centuries. Its phrases are known even by people who have never carefully read Matthew's Gospel. "Blessed are the meek." "You are the salt of the earth." "You are the light of the world." "Turn the other cheek." "Judge not." "Ask, and it will be given to you." "Enter by the narrow gate." "Go the extra mile". These words have gone far beyond the Church. They have entered literature, politics, and ordinary conversation.





But today we do not want merely to admire the Sermon on the Mount for its phrases nor as a famous piece of religious history. We do not want to treat it as a collection of noble sayings or spiritual maxims. We want to sit under it as disciples. We want to hear it as the very Words of Christ. We want to feel the weight of the fact that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, on a mountainside in Galilee, opened His mouth, and taught His disciples what life in His kingdom looks like. This is not merely moral advice. This is not a self-improvement talk. This is Christ the King describing the character and conduct of those who belong to His kingdom.

That is why I this lesson is titled, *Mountainside Manifesto: The Sermon That Still Shakes the Soul*. It shakes shallow morality. It shakes religious self-righteousness. It shakes the illusion of outward respectability. It shakes the comfortable version of Christianity that wants the consolations of Jesus without the commands of Jesus.





In this sermon, Jesus confronts the Jewish Pharisaical system of His day. He confronts legalism, religious self-righteousness, and man-made religious loopholes. He confronts people who had become experts at appearing righteous while missing the deeper righteousness of the heart.

And we pause here to remind ourselves that we should be careful not to caricature every Pharisee as personally insincere. Nicodemus, for example, came seeking Jesus. And Paul had once been a Pharisee who was zealous for the law. The issue is not that every Pharisee was knowingly pretending. Some were sincere, but sincerely wrong - trapped in a system of externalized righteousness but had become spiritually dead.

Jesus does not merely confront first-century Pharisees. He confronts religious self-righteousness wherever it is found. He confronts the man who says, "I am basically a good person." He confronts the Christian who knows his Bible, attends church, and quietly thanks God that he is not like those other people. Jesus goes straight through the veneer of religion and drills down into the heart.

I have had the privilege of standing along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, in that region near Capernaum where so much of Jesus' early teaching unfolded. The land rises gently from the lake. It is not difficult to imagine one of those sloping hillsides becoming a natural amphitheater. I remember standing there and feeling the breeze coming off the water. You can picture the sound carrying across the hillside. You can imagine the people gathering in clusters, some standing, some sitting, some curious, some needy, and some deeply drawn to this teacher from Nazareth. Fishermen, farmers, families with children, the frail and fragile would have been there. And especially, Matthew tells us, the disciples drew near.





Matthew writes, “And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them” (Matthew 5:1–2, NKJV).

That is a simple introduction, but it matters. The multitudes are present, but the disciples come near. Many hear Him, but His disciples are especially the ones being formed by Him. This sermon is not a manual by which unbelievers may find their way into heaven. It is kingdom instruction for kingdom people for kingdom living.

It is what life looks like when grace has brought one under the authority of Christ.

Throughout church history, Christians have wrestled a bit with how this sermon fits into the whole story of redemption. Across the theological spectrum, faithful interpreters and scholars have emphasized slightly different aspects of it.

Some have seen it as the ethic of the coming kingdom, the kind of life that belongs under the reign of the Messiah and will one day be displayed in fullness.

Others have emphasized that Jesus is expounding the moral law, not abolishing it, but driving it deeper into the heart and showing us our need for grace.

And still other academics have stressed the sermon as discipleship wisdom for Christians; the ethic of those who live under the rule of King Jesus.

Those perspectives all agree on something very important: the Sermon on the Mount is not, *here is how you get saved*.

Rather it is, *here is what saved people look like*.





This is why we need to be careful not to fall into one of two errors. On one side, we can turn the Sermon on the Mount into a new form of legalism - *Do this and you'll get to heaven*. That is not the gospel.

But on the other side, we can push the sermon away and say, *This standard is so high and so impossible that it has little to do with today's ordinary Christian living*.

That is also wrong.

Jesus preached this sermon to form disciples. It calls us to holiness and drives us to grace. It exposes us, but it also instructs us. It humbles us, but it also shows us the beauty of a life built upon the words of Christ.

One of the key verses for understanding the strength of the sermon is Matthew 5:20. Jesus says, “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” We should pause and try to hear that as the original listeners would have heard it. That statement would have landed like a boulder.





To the ordinary Galilean fisherman or farmer, the scribes and Pharisees were the professionals of religion. They knew the Scriptures. They prayed. They fasted. They tithed. They were the keepers of the rules. They were serious, disciplined, visibly religious men. In our terms, they were the stars (sometimes self-proclaimed) of outward religious performance.

So when Jesus says, “Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees,” the ordinary listener must have thought, “Who can do that? Who can *out-religion* the Pharisees?”

And that is precisely the point. Jesus is not saying, “Add a few more rules and beat them at their own game.” He is not calling for more external religion. He is calling for a different kind of righteousness altogether. Not merely visible righteousness nor rule-keeping. But a righteousness that comes from grace and reaches the motives, desires, thoughts - the very foundations of life.





The Pharisees could count mint leaves and cumin seeds, but Jesus goes after anger, lust, dishonesty, revenge, pride, greed, worry, hypocrisy, and false religion. They polished the outside of the cup. Jesus goes to the inside.

He does not merely inspect what others can see. He looks where we would rather not have Him look.

And that means this sermon is not simply a first-century word against Pharisees. It is a word against every form of religious self-reliance. It is a word against the phariseeism of platform and theological knowledge without humility. The Phariseeism of respectable church attendance without repentance.

The sermon unfolds in a very beautiful and deliberate way. First, Jesus gives us the portrait of who a Christian is, their character, their disposition, and attitudes. That is the *Beatitudes*: poor in spirit, mourning over sin, meek, hungry for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemaking, willing to suffer for Christ. Then He shows the practice of what a Christian does. He speaks of salt and light, fulfilling the law, anger, lust, marriage, truthfulness, retaliation, love of enemies, giving, prayer, fasting, treasure, worry, judging, asking, seeking, and knocking. Then He presses us toward perseverance: the narrow gate, false prophets, fruit, and His terrifying words “Lord, Lord”. And His conclusion - build your life upon the rock of His word. He is forming disciples.





So we begin where Jesus begins: with the Beatitudes. Matthew 5:3 says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

The word behind *poor* carries the idea of one who is beggarly, dependent. Not merely someone who is a little short on resources, but someone who has nothing to bring. To be poor in spirit is to recognize spiritual poverty before God. It is the opposite of self-sufficiency. It is the opposite of religious swagger. It is the opposite of a self-made humility that says “I think I am okay - compared to most other people.”

The poor in spirit know they bring nothing to God as a bargaining chip. No righteousness of their own. No little pile of good works with which they can negotiate into heaven. They come empty-handed. Psalm 34:6 says, “This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.” That is the posture Jesus blesses. “Lord, I have nothing unless You give it. I know nothing unless You teach it. I can do nothing unless You strengthen me. Kingdom life begins with one’s realization of spiritual poverty. And Jesus says, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”





Then Jesus says, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

This is not ordinary sadness. This is a deep grief over your sin. Grief over the brokenness of the world. Grief over violence, injustice, corruption, exploitation, spiritual apathy, hatred, the destruction of family, the destruction of children, the mockery of God. Grief over everything that rebellion against God has done. That is the kind of mourning Jesus blesses. It is not self-pity. It is not moodiness. It is not the sadness of wounded pride. It is godly sorrow.

Then Jesus says, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

Meekness is often misunderstood. It does not mean weakness. It does not mean timidity. It does not mean passivity. It does not mean a person has no convictions. Meekness is strength under control. Picture a stallion under the control of a skilled rider. The strength and speed are still there. But it is governed and directed for a purpose. That is meekness.





The meek Christian does not need to dominate every room. Does not need to win every exchange. Does not need to answer every insult. They are strong without being harsh. Bold? Yes.

They know the right time to speak and act by wisdom. David showed something of this when he had the opportunity to kill Saul and refused. He would not seize the kingdom by fleshly vengeance. He waited on the Lord. And of course, Jesus Himself says, "I am gentle and lowly in heart." No one was stronger than Jesus, and no one was meeker than Jesus. Today's aggressive people think they will inherit the earth. Jesus says, no, the meek will inherit the earth.

Then Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.”

Hunger and thirst are not mild words. These are survival words. A starving man does not say, “I wouldn’t mind a little food when convenient.” A thirsty man in the desert does not say, “Water would be a nice addition to today’s schedule.”

Hunger and thirst are urgent. Jesus is describing a soul that craves what is right before God. A soul that wants God’s will, in conduct, in worship, in marriage, in speech, in business, in justice.





The Christian is not content with a thin layer of religious respectability. He hungers and thirsts for what is right before God. And the promise is beautiful: “for they shall be filled.” The world offers a kind of chicken soup for the soul: comforting and marketable, but not enough to heal the wounds of sin.

Modern self-help can give you a language of affirmation, personal branding, and emotional management. But if it never deals with sin, never calls for repentance, never brings the soul before God, then it remains surface treatment for the wounds of sin that go much deeper.

Then Jesus says, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

Mercy is compassion in action toward the needy, the guilty, the wounded, the weak, and the undeserving. Mercy is not pretending sin does not matter. God’s mercy never denies His holiness. But mercy moves toward misery with kindness. And those who have received mercy - become merciful. Religious people can become hard and look at sinners with contempt. The Christian says, “If God has shown mercy to me in my failures, then I should show mercy to those God brings into my life.”





So the merciful person does not *crush the bruised reed*. *He does not quench the smoking flax*. That phrase comes from Isaiah 42:3, and Matthew applies it to Jesus in Matthew 12:20: “A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench.” A bruised reed was already bent and damaged, ready to snap, and of no real use.

A smoking flax was a dim, smoldering wick, almost out, barely giving light. The image is of our Lord; He does not crush what is already bruised. He does not snuff out the little remaining flame of a weak faith. He deals gently. We should handle the weak and wounded gently, even when their bruises require patience from us.

Then Jesus says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Pure means clean, unmixed, unpolluted. Not merely clean hands. Not merely public reputation. Psalm 51:10 says, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” Purity of heart means single-minded devotion to God. No double life. No hidden hypocrisy. No nightly secret love of sin covered by a daily religious mask.





And we need this badly in our age, because never before has there been so much opportunity to cultivate a secret life. Private screens. Private clicks. Private resentments. Private paranoia. All supported and confirmed by social media.

Jesus says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” There is a present sense in which the pure in heart perceive God more clearly. Sin clouds vision. But the pure in heart - they shall see God.

Then Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

We live in a divided society and a divided world. Families are divided. Churches are divided. Nations are divided. Social media feeds division. Politics often rewards division. International affairs so often assume that war and bombing will solve only what truth and righteousness can heal.





Not peace-fakers. Not people who pretend nothing is wrong. Not people who avoid every difficult conversation. But those who actively seek reconciliation. Those who pursue truth. Those who refuse to be governed by the outrage machine. Ephesians 2 says Christ Himself is our peace. He reconciles sinners to God and reconciles people to one another in His body through the cross. So when Christians make peace, they resemble their Father. And this begins at home, in marriage, in church, in friendships.

Then Jesus says, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” He expands His thought: “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad.” Persecution means being pursued, harassed, opposed, because of one’s loyalty to Christ. Reviling means to insult, reproach, slander. Many of us in the West know little of real persecution compared to many of our brothers and sisters around the world.





In parts of the world, following Christ may cost a person family, livelihood, freedom, and even life. Persecution can come through social pressure, but in its severest form it comes through government and religious authority. The prophets knew this. The apostles knew this. The early church knew this. In Acts 5, after the apostles were beaten, Scripture says they departed “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” That is astonishing. They did not rejoice in pain for pain’s sake. They rejoiced because they had been identified with Christ.

The Beatitudes are not optional decorations on the Christian life. They are not advanced material for spiritual specialists. They are the daily posture of kingdom people - of disciples - the portrait of who a Christian is.





Jesus moves from inner character to outward witness. He says, “You are the salt of the earth.” Notice that He does not say, “You might become salt.” He does not say, “A few unusually committed Christians are salt.” He says, “You *are* the salt of the earth.”

In the ancient world, salt was indispensable. We think of salt mainly as seasoning, and it does season. But in the ancient world, salt preserved. It held back decay in meat and fish. Around the Sea of Galilee, where fishing was central, this would have been obvious. Fish had to be preserved. Food spoiled quickly. Salt mattered.

Whole trade routes developed around salt. Rome had the Via Salaria, literally the Salt Road, associated with moving salt. In West Africa, salt from desert sources moved by caravan and became part of the great salt and gold trade. In other words, salt was not a small household convenience. It shaped routes, markets, and economies.





So when Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth,” He is saying His people are placed in a decaying world to preserve what is good and restrain what is corrupt. And our world is decaying. The distortion of God’s design for men and women. The normalization of dishonesty and thievery. The worship of self and leaders. Violence for political gain. The erosion of marital vows. The cheapening of human life. The destruction of children’s innocence. The celebration of sin as virtue. The paranoia that leads to violence. Yes - in the midst of all that - Christ’s people are to be salt in that world.

Be aware - faithful Christian witness can sting in a debauched culture. Not because we are trying to be obnoxious. Not because we enjoy confrontation. But because truth stings when a society has grown comfortable with lies.





But Jesus also warns that salt can become useless. Strictly speaking, pure salt does not lose its saltiness. But if salt is contaminated with outside elements salt is then rendered useless. And that is a warning to the Church. When Christians compromise truth, desire applause, hide convictions, remain silent when Christ calls for witness, and confuse being nice with being faithful, salt becomes good for nothing.

Later in the sermon, Jesus will warn against public religious performance. He will tell us to pray in secret, give in secret, fast in secret. But that does not mean Christianity becomes invisible. A privatized Christianity is a contradiction. Our good works are to be seen, but not so that we are glorified. Jesus says, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and *glorify your Father in heaven.*” Not glorify us. Not build our brand. Not praise our platform. Glorify the Father.





Now comes a major hinge in the sermon. Jesus says, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.” Up to this point, Jesus has been describing His people: their character in the Beatitudes and their witness as salt and light. Now He explains how His kingdom relates to everything God had already spoken in the Law and the Prophets. He is not tearing down the Old Testament. He is bringing it to its intended goal.

Why would anyone think Jesus came to destroy the Law? He cleansed the temple. He taught with astonishing authority. He challenged the Pharisees. He healed on the Sabbath. He exposed religious hypocrisy. So some might say, “Is He tearing down Moses? Is He setting aside the prophets?” Jesus says, “No”. “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.” Fulfill means to bring to completion to bring to the intended goal. Jesus is not saying the Old Testament was wrong. He is saying the Old Testament was pointing to Him, and our focus now shifts to His life, ministry, and cross.





This connects so well with our Old Testament survey. It connects with Romans. It connects with Luke 24, where Jesus explains that Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms spoke of Him.

The Bible is one continuous redemptive story through Christ. From Genesis forward. From Abraham justified by faith. Through the law that exposed sin and pointed forward. Through sacrifices. Through the priesthood. Through the temple. Through prophets. Through promises.

All of it moves toward and is fulfilled in Christ.

Hebrews says the law had a shadow of the good things to come. The sacrificial law is fulfilled in Christ; He is the once-for-all sacrifice. Christ is the great High Priest. Christ is the true temple. Christ is the Lamb of God. The civil law of Israel was for a theocratic nation under the old covenant. We do not apply it mechanically to the Church or to any modern nation-state. Though it can still teach us much about God's righteousness, justice, and holiness. And the moral law is deepened - Jesus presses it into the heart.



Some Christians have suggested that we should unhitch or unhinge from the Old Testament because it may confuse people or seem difficult to explain. But Jesus will not let us do that. The Old Testament was His Bible, and He said plainly that the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms spoke of Him (Luke 24:44–47). He did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17–18). To discard the Old Testament is therefore a serious theological error, because *all Scripture* is given by inspiration of God and remains profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16–17).





On the other side, some Christians almost re-attach themselves to old covenant shadows, as though Christ had not fulfilled them. That also gravely misses the point. Hebrews says the law had “a shadow of the good things to come,” but not the very image of those things, and that Christ offered Himself once for all (Hebrews 10:1, 10–14).

Paul says Christ is “the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 10:4). And Colossians tells us that food laws, festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths were “a *shadow* of things to come, but the substance is of Christ” (Colossians 2:16–17).

So we do not discard the Old Testament, and we do not return to its shadows as though Christ had not come. We preach Christ! The goal, fulfillment, and substance of the Law and the Prophets.

This is also where we need to be careful with a phrase that has become common in public life, *Judeo-Christian ethic*. Historically, that phrase gained prominence in America in the 1930s and 1940s, partly as a way to resist antisemitism and fascism and to speak of shared moral foundations in the West. Today the phrase *Judeo-Christian ethic* functions mainly as an American civic and social term; it is not a theological category the New Testament gives us for understanding life under Christ.





Theologically, the Sermon on the Mount will not let us settle for that phrase as though Jesus merely came to endorse a broad civil morality shared with Judaism. Jesus says He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. That means that Christianity is not part of a generic Judeo-Christian ethic - it is a unique Christ-centered life, a kingdom ethic introduced in the Sermon on the Mount.

But, as mentioned, we do not discard the Old Testament. Nor do we revive its shadows as though Christ had not come.

We preach Christ! He is unique and preeminent. He is the goal and fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.





Now Jesus, to confirm this new ethic, moves into the famous “You have heard that it was said... but I say to you” sections.

Jesus is not merely saying, “Here is another rabbinic opinion.” He is not offering explanatory footnotes. He speaks with astonishing authority. He speaks as the divine Son. Not overthrowing the Old Testament - but overthrowing superficial interpretations, loophole religion, and false righteousness.

He is revealing the true depth of God’s expectations.

First, anger and murder. Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder’... But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.” Murder is the fruit - anger is the root - and both begin with contempt.

Jesus uses “Raca,” which means something like empty-headed, worthless, contemptible. Then He mentions saying, “You fool.” The issue is not that one syllable word automatically sends someone to hell while another insult does not. The issue is contemptuous hatred. The heart that dismisses another image-bearer as worthless is moving in the moral direction of murder.





Think how relevant this is today. Digital rage. Political rage. Road rage. Family bitterness. Church division. Social media contempt. The casual if not celebratory way people destroy one another with words. Jesus says this is not a small thing. And then He says if you bring your gift to the altar and remember your brother has something against you, leave your gift and go be reconciled. Reconciliation takes priority over religious ritual. God is not impressed with worship that coexists comfortably with hatred. He wants pure hearts.

Lust and adultery come next. Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

Jesus pushes past external morality into internal purity. Guard your thoughts. Guard your eyes. Guard what you click. Guard where your imagination goes. The algorithms are aggressive. The industry is designed to be addictive. Jesus treats this with extreme urgency.





If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off. He is not commanding literal self-harm. He is commanding decisive action against sin.

John Owen put it memorably: be killing sin, or sin will be killing you. Sin never stays small. Lust does not say, “I only want a small corner of your life.” Like a weed it grows. It enslaves. It darkens. It damages. It distorts. It brings shame.

Parents, grandparents, let us be very clear here: this is part of our responsibility. Children do not have the maturity to guard their own eyes in a world designed to enslave them. Screen time, advertisements, games, and social media feeds can put things into a child's mind that will remain there for decades, for life.

We cannot protect children from every sorrow of life, but we must not be careless about what we allow them to see and hear. The eye matters. The imagination matters. Memory matters. Many of us know there are scenes, images, films, or moments we saw long ago that are not forgotten - they impact our thinking still today. Jesus knew what He was talking about. The lamp of the body is the eye.





Now divorce and marriage. Jesus says, “Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you...” (Matthew 5:31–32). Jesus cuts through the casual divorce culture of His day. Religious leaders debated what conditions allowed a man to put away his wife, and how the certificate of divorce should be handled. Some made divorce far too easy; others were more strict (Matthew 19:3–9; Mark 10:2–12).

Jesus restores the seriousness of marriage. Marriage is covenant. What God has joined together, man must not separate (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9). The prophet Malachi speaks of marriage as covenant and says the Lord hates divorce (Malachi 2:14–16). The main point is unmistakable: God views marriage as sacred, not disposable.

Divorce rates in our society are painfully high even divorce among professing Christians is higher than it should be. When Christians treat marriage casually, our salt loses its savor and our light dims. If believers held marital vows as sacred before God, families would be stronger. Children would be more secure. Churches would be healthier. Society itself would benefit.





Now, this does not mean there is no grace for those who have failed. The gospel is for real sinners with real life histories. Many people have walked through divorce with tears, confusion, and repentance. The church must not speak as though every divorced person carries the same story or the same guilt.

But we have become so afraid of offending people that we avoid the subject of divorce from the pulpit almost entirely. We fear that if we speak plainly, someone will not come back to church next week. But perhaps part of the reason we are in this position is that the Church has too often been hesitant to speak plainly before the damage is done.

Now oaths and integrity. Jesus says, “But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”

The Pharisees had loopholes. If you swore by this, it counted. If you swore by that, perhaps it did not. Jesus rejects the whole game. Christians should be trustworthy. Some people are dramatic in their promises. “I absolutely guarantee.” “You can count on me.” “Believe me.” “I swear.” But then they do not follow through.

Jesus says simple truthfulness should mark His people. A Christian’s plain word should be reliable. In a world of political spin and hedged speech Christians should be known for integrity. Yes means yes. No means no.





Then retaliation. Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person...” Then He gives the well-known phrase: “But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.”

Now, this passage is often misused. Worldly people love to quote it selectively and say, “See, Christian, you must just stand there and take it. Turn the other cheek.” But that is not what Jesus is teaching. Scripture does not forbid self-defense for self and family. It does not require the government to abandon justice. It does not require a person to enable abuse. “Turn the other cheek” is not a command to become a doormat for evil. It is a command to refuse the spirit of personal revenge. Jesus is addressing the instinct that says, “You hurt me, so now I must hurt you back.” He is forbidding tit-for-tat retaliation, not wisdom, protection, lawful justice, or moral courage.

This is especially important in our culture, because we now have an entire vocabulary for cataloging grievances. The term “microaggression” was coined in the 1970s by Harvard psychiatrist Chester Pierce and later popularized to describe subtle slights or insults directed toward marginalized people. There can be real sins of speech hidden in small comments, and Christians should not be careless with words.

But there is also a danger when an entire society trains people to scan every word, every expression, and every omission as a potential offense. That can form a soul that is always collecting evidence. The result is a heart trained toward suspicion and a kind of relational paranoia resulting in bitterness. Always wondering, “Was that aimed at me? Did they slight me? Are they against me?” Instead of strengthening the person, this can make the heart more fragile and more ready to judge ordinary life through perceived offense. Jesus calls His disciples out of that courtroom of the heart, where we are always gathering evidence and prosecuting others.





“If someone sues you for your tunic, give your cloak also. If someone compels you to go one mile, go two.”

That phrase comes from the Roman practice where a soldier could compel someone to carry a load for a mile.

Jesus says *go the extra mile*.

That is where the phrase comes from. When someone asks you to do something inconvenient, you may feel irritated.

You may feel put upon. You may feel resentful. But if you freely give a little more than asked, something changes in your own heart. You are no longer merely dragged by duty. You are acting from grace and it serves to kill bitterness.

Then one of Jesus' most memorable statements: "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."
Not merely tolerate them. Not merely avoid them. Not fantasize about their downfall. *Love them.* Bless them. Do good to them. Pray for them. Why? Because they are all created in God's image - the imago dei. God shows common grace even to your enemies.





Now notice the practical wisdom in the words Jesus uses. If someone curses you, that is verbal. So you answer verbally with blessing. You do not return curse for curse. You bless. If someone spitefully uses you, that does not mean you must keep placing yourself under their abuse. There are times when wisdom requires distance. But even if you no longer have close personal interaction with that person, Jesus still says you *pray for them*. You can pray for repentance. You can pray for their salvation. You can pray that God would bless them.

This does not mean we deny justice. It does not mean we call evil good. But it does mean bitterness must not own us.

Hebrews 12:15 warns us to watch carefully “lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.” That is exactly what bitterness does. It begins like a root underground. Hidden. But then it springs up and causes trouble, and it does not stop with the bitter person. It defiles many. Bitterness destroys families, churches, friendships - the health of the bitter person themselves. Loving one’s enemy and forgiveness is not a sentimental weakness. It releases us from becoming permanently chained to the wrong done against us.





Then Jesus says, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

The word translated perfect has the idea of mature, complete, brought to its proper end. Jesus is not teaching sinless perfectionism in this life. He is calling for wholeness, undivided loyalty, mature love that reflects the Father’s love. A tall order no doubt - God’s desire is for us to emulate His love to the world. Do we fall short - of course - that’s where grace comes in day after day. But we continue to push forward to His calling and pursue the high mark He has set for us.

In chapter 6 Jesus says, “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them.” Then He addresses *giving*, *prayer*, and *fasting*. He does not say if you give, if you pray, if you fast. He says *when*. These are expected practices in the life of a disciple. And He confronts the temptation of religious performance: Do not give to be seen. Do not pray to be admired. Do not fast so people notice your spirituality.





Giving should be real. Give to your church. Give to the poor. Give to homeless shelters. Do some research. Be wise. But when you give, do not advertise it. God knows.

Jesus continues, “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place.”

The word translated “room” refers to an inner or private chamber, a secluded place away from public view. Most listeners would not have pictured a modern bedroom or closet exactly, but they would have understood the point: get away from the stage. Leave the audience behind. Pray where only the Father sees. We recognize it is okay to ask others, “How may I pray for you?” The church must pray publicly together. Families should pray together. Jesus Himself prayed publicly at times. But never pray for show.





It may not be a bad idea sometimes literally to go into a closet and pray, just to feel the privacy and aloneness with God. The point is not the architecture of the room. The point is secrecy before the Father. The Psalms often speak of crying out to God. There is something healthy about private prayer where you truly pour out your heart. For some of us, the front seat of our car may be one of the best places to do that, with no one else in the car and the windows up. Not merely raising your voice, but honestly, emotionally, reverently telling God what is on your heart. Pleading with Him for mercy. Asking Him for grace. Psalm 77:1 says: "I cry out to God for help; I cry out to God to hear me." Psalm 88:1-2 continues "Lord, you are the God who saves me; day and night I cry out to you. May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry."

Then Jesus gives what we often call the *Lord's Prayer*, or the *Our Father*. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Praying these words should not be in vain repetition, as though saying five *Our Fathers* mechanically earns a favor from God. Jesus specifically warns against vain repetitions. But we should not shy away from praying this prayer either.





And we can pray it in our own words.

Lord, I come to You as Father. Your name is holy. Your name is above all names. Let Your kingdom come. Let the righteousness and blessing of Your kingdom flow even now into my life. Let Your will be done in and through me, in my family, in my church, on earth, as perfectly as it is done in heaven. Give me this day my daily food and meet my needs. Thank You for the job with which you have blessed me as it provides resources for food and home. Forgive me as I forgive others - I specifically forgive Charlie who did such and such. Lead me not into temptation, especially the temptation of blah blah which I face daily. Deliver me from evil.

That is a full pattern of prayer.

Then fasting. Fasting has been somewhat lost in the Christian life today. Jesus assumes His people will fast. Now, some of you are on medications or under medical care, and fasting may be difficult or even dangerous. Be wise and seek medical counsel before fasting. I know of situations where someone fasted and their blood chemistry went sideways - so be careful. But many can fast in some way. Maybe for a full day or even from a meal. Maybe by taking a lighter meal. Maybe a set time of prayer instead of lunch. And while fasting from social media or laptops is not exactly what Jesus means by fasting, there is still wisdom in disconnecting from earthly noise for a day in order to seek the Lord.





Then Jesus turns to finances. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.”

We save for retirement. We do not want to outlive our savings. We do not want our spouse left vulnerable. We look at inflation, markets, housing, taxes, medical costs, and the uncertainty of old age, and we say, “Lord, this is not theoretical.” And Jesus knows that. He is not condemning prudence. He is not condemning work, saving, provision, or wise planning. Scripture commends diligence and warns against laziness.

But Jesus is warning us not to make our savings account our security blanket and not to allow financial prudence quietly become financial worship.

Earthly treasure is fragile. Moths eat it. Rust corrodes it. Thieves steal it. Markets fall. Accounts fluctuate. Possessions are disrupted. The problem is not that earthly things are evil. The problem is that they are not strong enough to bear the weight of the things that matter in life. “Where your treasure is,” Jesus says, “there your heart will be also.” And that is the test. Not merely what do you possess, but what possesses you?





Then He says, “The lamp of the body is the eye.” What we look at matters. What enters through the eye illuminates or darkens the whole life. There are things some of us saw decades ago that we still remember and still impact our life and the way we think. Scenes from movies. Images we should never have seen. Sin knows how to use the eye. But so does righteousness. Look at what is good. Look at what is true. Look at Scripture. Look at creation as God’s handiwork. Look at your spouse with covenant love. Look at the needs of others with mercy. Do not look longingly at ungodly things and expect your inner life to remain full of light.

Paul says in Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report... meditate on these things.”

The word translated meditate carries the idea of letting the mind dwell there. It is deliberate visual and mental attention. So the Christian must ask, what do I regularly look at, what do I keep returning to, where does my mind dwell? The eye lets things in, and the mind keeps them there. Jesus says the eye is the lamp of the body. That is why we are to set our mind on what is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, and worthy of praise.





“No one can serve two masters.” You cannot serve God and mammon. Not should not, but cannot. Money is a useful servant, but it is a jealous and terrible master. This struggle is not reserved for the wealthy, a poor man can be enslaved to mammon just as a rich man. This is because mammon (derived from a root meaning "that in which one trusts") is not merely currency; it is a spiritual power that demands the allegiance of our hearts. It is the spirit of earthly security, possessions, status, and control. When we look to mammon, we are looking to a rival deity to provide the safety and identity that only God can offer. We cannot serve both because we cannot place our ultimate trust in two places at once.

Then Jesus gives one of the more encouraging sections in the sermon. “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life.” Do not worry. Now that lands very personally for many of us. We justify worry by calling it *planning*. “I am just preparing for contingencies.” “I am just being responsible.” And of course, some planning is wise - Proverbs commends prudence. But some of us have dozens of contingencies in our mind, some of them from ten years ago. We planned for things that never happened. We rehearsed conversations that never took place. We imagined disasters that never came. We spent emotional energy on tomorrows God never assigned to us.





Jesus knows this. He says look at the birds - they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Look at the lilies. They do not toil or spin, yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. This is not laziness. Birds work, they gather. But they do not worry. Jesus is calling us to trust His Father.

Worry is future-focused. It reaches forward into things God has not yet assigned to us, and then it tries to control them before they arrive. We often call it planning, prudence, or responsibility; and sometimes genuine planning is wise. But much of our worry is not planning. It is fear of tomorrow without trusting the grace God has promised for tomorrow. And over time, worry wears us down. It does not stay neatly tucked away. There is a reason people say, “You are going to worry yourself sick.” In a very real sense, we can do just that.





The American Psychological Association notes that stress affects major systems throughout the body, including the cardiovascular, endocrine, gastrointestinal, nervous, respiratory, reproductive, and musculoskeletal systems. Cleveland Clinic warns that stress can show up physically in headaches, muscle tension, digestive problems, sleep disruption, high blood pressure, and weakened immunity leading to many other diseases. The Clinic also notes that unmanaged or prolonged stress can keep the body in a kind of overdrive, with cortisol and inflammation becoming part of the problem. And chronic internal inflammation is particularly dangerous because it silently damages healthy tissues and organs, greatly increasing the risk of serious diseases.

What burdens the mind can weigh upon the body. So when Jesus says, "Do not worry," He is not giving a shallow slogan or something important to the religious side of our life. He is not scolding the anxious. He is guiding His people back to the Father's care. He knows worry is harmful, and He knows trust is healing.

Then chapter 7 begins with one of the most quoted and most misunderstood statements in the Bible:
“Judge not, that you be not judged.”

Everyone who is not a Christian seems to know that verse. The moment a Christian says anything is morally wrong, someone invariably replies, “But doesn’t the Bible say, ‘Judge not’?” And yes, it does. But Jesus is not forbidding all moral discernment. He cannot mean that, because later in this same chapter He tells us to beware of false prophets and to know them by their fruits. That requires discernment. In John 7:24, Jesus says plainly, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment” (NKJV). So the Bible is not forbidding moral judgment. The whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, requires us to distinguish truth from error, holiness from sin, righteousness from wickedness, true worship from idolatry, and faithful shepherds from wolves in sheep’s clothing.





But here is the balance. Final judgment belongs to God. He alone sees the heart perfectly. He alone knows every motive, every hidden fact, every unseen circumstance. We do not sit on His throne. We do not condemn souls as though we were the Judge of all the earth. God has also ordained preaching, teaching, and moral witness. The prophets judged Israel's sin. John the Baptist judged Herod's adultery. Paul judged open immorality in the Corinthian church. So the world cannot take one phrase, "Judge not," rip it from its context and use it to silence the Church. The Church is not required to bless nor ignore debauched lifestyles, excuse sin, and call it love. That is not love. That is abdication.

So what is Jesus forbidding? He is forbidding the spirit that sees the speck in a brother's eye while ignoring the plank in your own. He is forbidding the person who is severe with others, and gentle with himself. He is forbidding the person who uses truth as a weapon but refuses repentance personally.

That is why Jesus says, first remove the plank from your own eye. Then, and do not miss this, then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. He does not say, "Ignore your brother's speck forever." He says, "Deal honestly with your own plank first, then help your brother." The goal is not superiority - the goal is restoration. The goal is not to win an argument - the goal is to speak truth with humility, holiness with tears, and correction with a heart that knows it also lives by grace.





Then Jesus says, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened.” We do not know how much God is willing to give because we often do not ask. Or we ask a few times and persistence runs out. Jesus says we should *ask, seek, knock*. There is persistence in that. If earthly fathers, being evil, know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him? God is a Father who gives good gifts.

Jesus returns to more sobering thoughts: “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction... Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

This is sobering. Sometimes in evangelical circles, we can make Christianity sound easy. We must be careful. Salvation is by grace through faith. Christ does save sinners freely. We do not earn entrance into the kingdom.

But the Christian life is not casual. The gate truly is narrow. The way truly is difficult. We were reminded of costly discipleship last week when we quoted Bonhoeffer: “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” That is not salvation by works. That is discipleship under the Lordship of Christ. The narrow gate is not Christ plus our merit. But it is Christ who saves us freely and calls us to follow Him seriously.





Then Jesus warns about false prophets. “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”

False prophets do not arrive wearing signs that say, “I am trying to deceive you.” They come in sheep’s clothing, and that means they often sound convincing. They use Christian language, speak warmly, quote Scripture, and present themselves as uniques and safe guides. But Jesus says we must look beyond the surface.

Fruit matters. Doctrine matters. Character matters. And in our own day, this includes the whole pattern of a teacher's life. If a man is in full-time ministry and his life is marked by expensive suits, private jets, 10,000 sq. ft. houses, and constant appeals for money - that is not a small matter. A minister may live comfortably. He may provide for his family. He may own a home. But the shepherd's life should not look like the top .1%. If the sheep are being fleeced (if not feasted upon) rather than fed, then Jesus tells us to pay attention. You will know them by their fruits.





Then we come to one of the most frightening passages in all of Scripture. Jesus says, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven.” This passage should make us sober and quickly so. These are religious people. They claim works, prophecy, casting out demons in His name. And yet Jesus says, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” Nearness to holy things is not the same as conversion. Many will have heard the sermons, seen the miracles, traveled in the community of the church. Yet are lost.

Jesus concludes with the great image of the two builders. “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.” The wise man hears and does. The foolish man hears but does not do. Both men hear. Both men build. Both men have houses. From the outside, the houses may have looked similar, for a time. But then the storm comes. Rain descends. Floods come. Winds blow. The difference is foundation.





The house built on the rock stands. The house built on sand falls, and great is its fall. The rock is the authority of Jesus' teaching, the Word of God. The rock is Christ Himself as the sure foundation. When life throws storms at you, and it will, only the house with a foundation stands.

This connects beautifully with Psalm 18:2, "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer." The Hebrew word often used for fortress or stronghold carries the idea of a secure height, a place of refuge beyond the reach of the enemy.

Psalm 18:33 says, "He makes my feet like the feet of deer, and sets me on my high places." Habakkuk 3:19 uses similar language: "The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills."

The picture is of God giving His people stability standing on the sure rock of His word.

Matthew says the people were astonished at Jesus' teaching, "for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." Jesus does not speak like a commentator, merely citing other teachers. He speaks as the King. "But I say to you." "Whoever hears these sayings of Mine." "I never knew you." "Depart from Me." "Build on My words."

No mere moral teacher can speak like that. No ordinary rabbi can speak like that. Jesus speaks with divine authority.





So what do we do with this sermon? We must not turn it into moralism, as though Jesus were saying, “Try harder and God will accept you.” The standard is too high for that.

This sermon exposes us. It drives us to Christ. We need grace. But neither should we push it away as some unreachable ideal with no relevance for ordinary Christian life. Jesus is teaching disciples how to live by grace, under the Father’s care, in the power of the Spirit. This is not vague civil morality, nor merely a shared religious tradition. This is Christ’s sermon, Christ’s authority, Christ’s kingdom, and Christ’s call to discipleship.

This sermon confronts the illusion that outward respectability is enough or the illusion that Christianity can be reduced to private comfort. This sermon destroys the illusion that Jesus can be admired but not obeyed.

This class was prepared through personal study of Scripture and careful engagement with trusted scholarship on the Gospel of John. Generative AI tools were used to assist with research, organization, and the drafting of phrasing. All final interpretations, judgments, and content reflect the author's convictions.



Murder is not only the act; anger and contempt are murder in seed form. Adultery is not only the act; lust is adultery in the heart. Love is not merely kindness toward friends; it extends even to enemies.

Jesus then says that not one jot or tittle will pass from the law until all is fulfilled.

A jot was the smallest Hebrew letter, the yod. A tittle was a tiny stroke distinguishing one letter from another. Think of the difference between an O and a Q. Jesus is saying that not even the smallest pen mark of God's Word is disposable.