

MATTHEW

Lesson 3

Matthew 5:1 - 6:18

In our last lesson, we looked at Christ's preparation for his ministry. John the Baptist proclaimed his coming. Then, after his baptism, God led him into the wilderness for forty days of fasting. Finally, at a time of great physical weakness and exhaustion, he was tested by Satan.

We observed many parallels between God's leading of the Jews into the wilderness and His leading of Christ into the wilderness. Both of these trying excursions prepared them for coming events, because the wilderness is a place where we have nothing, and we must depend on God for everything. Thus, in that place, we can grow in our appreciation of His sovereign care over us. As evidenced in our study, God always has a purpose when he leads His children into the wilderness. So it is, and through following Him, we will always grow as a result of our wilderness experience.

While Christ may have been physically weakened after 40 days of fasting, we saw that it did not spiritually weaken him, and Satan was unable to tempt him. In similar fashion, fasting and prayer helps us to grow stronger in our faith and our walk as well, so that we are able to withstand the wiles of the devil.

We will continue our study of Matthew with a look at Christ's first teaching ministry—the Sermon on the Mount. Our scripture for this week is Matthew 5:1 through Matthew 6:18. The Sermon on the Mount answers the question, "Now that I am following Christ, how should I live out my life?" In very real and practical terms, Christ himself will teach us how we are to live as people of the Kingdom of God. It could be as much of an eye-opener for us as it was for those who heard it then.

Ever since the Babylonian captivity and the loss of the Temple, the Jews had been living and worshipping in accordance with around the "synagogue system". The synagogue system allowed Jews to meet together in local towns and villages for prayer, the reading of the Holy Scriptures and for fellowship. The synagogue became a miniature sanctuary to replace the loss of the Jerusalem Temple. Teachers, or rabbi's, would teach the Law and the Prophets (the Old Testament) to their community, and they would lead by living example.

In particular, a group of secular laymen began to focus on outward displays of what it meant to follow the law exactly. These laymen would come to be called the Pharisees, who religiously would attempt to follow the writings of the rabbinical scholars as they interpreted the "oral" law for the Jews.

In a nutshell, the "Talmudic Method" of text study prescribes that any text that is deemed worthy of serious study must be assumed to have been written with such care and precision that every term, expression, generalization or exception is significant not so much for what it states as for what it implies. Statements apparently contradictory to each other are reconciled by the discovery of some subtle distinction, and statements apparently irrelevant to each other are analyzed into their ultimate elements and shown to contain some common underlying principle. The harmonization of apparent contradictions and the interlinking of apparent irrelevancies are two characteristic features of the Talmudic method of text study. For more information on the Talmudic Method, please see Harry Austryn Wolfson's *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. 1929).

Thus, following the writings of specific talmudic writers, the so-named "Talmud" would be developed as an interpretation of the Torah (the Law). Over time, the Talmud was given increasing emphasis; "tradition" and the reasoning and interpretation of the writers was ultimately given more weight than the actual Law itself.

Each Talmudic interpretation would have its own followers who would "yoke" themselves to that particular rabbi's teaching, in an attempt to live out the exact letter of the law and oral tradition contained within it. It is from this group of pious, overly zealous, religious leaders that the Jews found themselves weighed down with heavy burdens, and it is this group and this lifestyle that Jesus addresses in the Sermon on the Mount.

So, how then are we to live as followers of Christ? Let's see what Jesus teaches us. Read Chapter 5 and Chapter 6:1-18 and answer the following:

1. **Blessed:** one writer defines this as meaning "a joy that has its secret within". As recorded in Matthew 5:1-12, Jesus employs eight "blessings" as teachings about how we are to conduct ourselves in the Kingdom. These "Beatitudes" stand in stark contrast to conventional wisdom, and they set us apart as followers of Christ.
 - a. Examine Matthew 5:1-2 and 5:3-4. What do they have in common with Isaiah 61:1-2?

 - b. Identify and list the remaining six blessings, found in Matthew 5:5-12.

2. Christ goes on to tell us that we are both salt and light in Matthew 5:13-16. Salt is a preservative, and in like fashion, we are to metaphorically help keep the world around us from decaying completely away. With respect to the "light" metaphor in these verses, why does Christ say that we are to let our light shine?

3. In Matthew 5:17-20, Christ addresses the Law, Scripture (the Old Testament), and himself. What kind of righteousness does he stipulate is required for entrance into the kingdom of heaven?

4. In Matthew 5:21-48, Christ teaches us about such righteousness in his use of five "antitheses", or opposites. You can easily identify each of these, since they all begin with Christ saying, "You have heard..., but I tell you...". List each of the five things he teaches us, and how they are different from what the Pharisees were teaching.

5. Look at Matthew 5:45 again. What does this verse mean to you? What is Christ telling each of us about life as a follower of Christ?

6. Following his teaching regarding the blessings of the kingdom, and how we are to live a righteous life; Jesus now addresses, in Matthew 6:1-18, the three most prominent religious obligations of the Pharisees. These are almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. Specifically, regarding Christ's instructions to us in Matthew 6:1, how we can do what he says in this verse, but also follow his admonition in Matthew 5:16? Is there a contradiction?

7. Regarding Matthew 6:2-4, what is Christ teaching us about giving?

8. Regarding Matthew 6:5-8, what is Christ teaching us about prayer?

9. Regarding Matthew 6:16-18, what is Christ teaching us about fasting? Does this teaching still apply today, or is fasting something that ended with the beginning of Christ's earthly ministry?

Our study of this lesson may have told us things that we did not want to hear; it may have challenged us in areas we didn't want to be challenged in; and it certainly called us to be separated from the world around us.

To follow Christ is the most blessing-filled life that anyone can lead. I encourage you to read, heed, and apply his teachings to your life starting today. It will be a decision you will never regret.

May He richly bless you as you study what our Lord and Savior teaches each of us about our daily living. May your light shine brightly to all those around you, and may you experience His peace and joy, which are never-ending and go beyond any human understanding. Have a great week everyone!

In Christ,

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