

The Sermon on the Mount Part 7

Matthew 5:21-26

Thesis: We are a people who follow Jesus, who listen to the voice of God, and who get in action around what the Lord is saying through the power of his Holy Spirit.

Text: Matthew 5 – 7

The Sermon on the Mount is one of the most famous passages in the Bible. People refer to it and quote from this teaching of Jesus all the time.

These words of Jesus are revolutionary, radical, and relational (righteousness). I wonder if the words of Jesus have lost their cutting edge in our lives because of familiarity.

God is showing me wonderful things from his Word. And, the Lord is using The Sermon on the Mount to transform me.

So, I am asking the Lord to encourage you by his Holy Spirit and to speak to us as we spend time on Matthew 5 – 7 over the next months.

What we have considered so far in our time looking at The Sermon on the Mount.

In a message last November, we got through an overview of The Sermon on the Mount on 11'10'24.

Then, we looked at Matthew 5:3-5: The Poor in Spirit, The Grieved, and The Unimportant on 11'17'24.

In a message on 11'24'24, we looked at Matthew 5:6-8: The Hungry, The Merciful, and The Pure in Heart.

In a message on 7'13'25, we considered Matthew 5:9-12: The Peacemakers, The Persecuted, and the Misunderstood. Actually, we only considered what it means to be a peacemaker.

In a message on 7'20'25, we finished looking at our kingdom identity from Matthew 5:9-16: The Peacemakers, The Persecuted, and the Misunderstood. We also sought to understand three illustrations of the way we show up in this world as a part of our kingdom identity: as salt, light, and a city on a hill.

In a message on 7'27'25, we looked at Matthew 5:17-20. Jesus came to fulfill the Torah. Jesus' teaching on righteousness brings the Torah to its completion.

Today, we will continue looking at the second Main Section of The Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5:17 – 7:12. This is the main body of teaching. In this section, Jesus tells us what he means for his followers to be righteous. Righteousness is living in right relationship with God and others. It is a character trait that creates justice and peace in the world.

Here is an important perspective to keep in mind:

As we look at The Sermon on the Mount, I will share with you what I am learning and processing, some of which is new to me. **But please understand: The Lord can speak to you through his Word without all this teaching I am doing and without all the research we are processing. What we are doing together is to help us enter into the context of this Word, and to let the Lord speak to us in our current context.** The Lord can do that through the Holy Spirit whenever you open God's word and read it devotionally or study it thoroughly. Getting into God's Word and listening for The Voice is one of the most important spiritual practices the Lord has given us for growing in our relationships with God and others. **I pray that our time in The Sermon on the Mount will stir in you a greater love for God, for God's word, and for the leadership of Jesus in your life.**

Consider While Reading:

The first hearers of these words were mostly low-status, powerless Israelites on the fringes of mainstream society ([The Bible Project](#), Weekly Playlist, January 1-7). They were the impoverished, the infirmed, the unimportant, the oppressed, and the ignored.

Overview:

"The introduction (5:3-16) announces the surprising and counterintuitive identity of those who are a part of God's Kingdom. Then comes the main body of teachings (5:17-7:12), where Jesus explains further what he means when he calls his followers to be 'righteous.' Finally, Jesus concludes the sermon (7:13-27) by calling people to make a choice about how they're going to respond" ([The Bible Project](#), Weekly Playlist, January 1-7).

The Sermon on the Mount is carefully designed and organized.

1. **There are 3 main parts to The Sermon on the Mount.**
 - a. The middle part is divided into 3 parts.
 - b. Each of the parts of the middle part is divided into 3 parts.
 - c. Right at the center of the center of The Sermon on the Mount is the Lord's Prayer.
2. **The Bible tells us what it means for God's Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven.**
 - a. The kingdom of God coming to earth is the one of the main themes of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.
3. **From the beginning, humans rebelled and started to build their own kingdom by their own wisdom.**
4. **So, God chose one family, Israel, to join him in his mission.**
 - a. And, God offered them his wisdom.
 - b. That wisdom was called the Torah—the teaching.
 - c. Beginning on with Moses on Mt. Sinai, God entered into a covenant with Isreal.
 - d. **The goal was for Israel, one nation, to be transformed by God's wisdom, so that they could represent God's Kingdom before all the nations and to lead the nations back to God.**
5. **In Jesus' day, the kingdom of God was nowhere to be seen.**
 - a. Instead, Israel was under the rule of the Roman Empire and Roman oppressors.
6. **So, why wasn't God's Kingdom coming?**
 - a. Some religious leaders-- the **Pharisees**-- believed Israel was not being faithful enough to the Torah.
 - b. Other religious leaders—the **Sadducees**—said it would be best if Israel found a way to cooperate with Rome. They were the power brokers in Jesus' day.
 - c. Some people ran to the hills to become freedom fighters against Rome. They were known as the **Zealots**.
 - d. Others **withdrew to the desert**, waiting for God to use them to start the new Israel.
7. **But walk around the country of Israel, like Jesus did in his day, and here is what you would find.**
 - a. You would find mostly normal people.
 - b. They were trying to figure out how to live their lives as best they can.
 - c. Most people were living in poverty and were carving out a subsistence living.
 - d. There were lots of poor and sick people.
 - e. They were oppressed by high taxes.
 - f. Rome had taken their land away from them.

- g. Most people were struggling to pay the heavy taxes imposed on them by their Roman occupiers.
- h. In essence, the people of Jesus' day were powerless and hopeless.
- 8. **Jesus went to these people** healing the sick, setting free the demonized, mending broken hearts, and bringing salvation.
 - a. Jesus came with good news.
 - b. And, Jesus told these people that the kingdom of God was arriving.
 - c. People came from all over to hear his teaching and to get healing, deliverance, and encouragement.
- 9. **One day, Jesus went up to a tall hill or small mountain and said, "The arrival of kingdom of God is starting here and now with you."**
 - a. The kingdom of God was starting with the powerless, the weak, and the nobodies.
 - b. **Where can you go to see God's presence and blessing?**
 - i. You see God's presence and blessing among the poor in spirit, the crushed, and the defeated.
 - ii. The kingdom of God was not coming first among the wealthy and the powerful.
 - iii. The kingdom of God was coming to the people standing right before Jesus.

The structure of The Sermon on the Mount:

There are **3 main sections** to The Sermon on the Mount.

1. **Main Section 1: Matthew 5:3 – 16.** This is the introduction. Jesus tells us about the **kingdom identity** of his followers. Jesus gives 9 sayings about who is experiencing the good life of God's kingdom.
 - a. Matthew 5:3 – 12. The Good Life.
 - i. The Poor in Spirit (3).
 - ii. The Grievors (4).
 - iii. The Unimportant (5).
 - iv. The Hungry (6).
 - v. The Merciful (7).
 - vi. The Pure in Heart (8).
 - vii. The Peacemakers (9).
 - viii. The Persecuted (10).
 - ix. The Misunderstood (11-12).
 - b. Matthew 5:13. Salt of the Earth.
 - i. "In the Hebrew Scriptures, salt is a symbol of God's long-lasting covenant relationship with Israel. So Jesus is claiming that he

- and his followers are carrying Israel's covenant relationship to its fulfillment" ([The Bible Project](#), Weekly Playlist, January 1-7).
- ii. Salt is an important preservative.
- iii. Salt is a seasoning. We are to bring out the God-flavors in this world (MSG).
- iv. A little salt goes a long way. Christians are supposed to influence rather than be influenced by the ways of this world.
- c. Matthew 5:14 – 16. The Light of the World and a city on a hill.
 - i. According to Isaiah, one day the inhabitants of Jerusalem will reflect God's light, peace, and blessing out to all the world.
 - ii. Jerusalem is the image of the city on a hill that shines for all the world to see. We are a part of that family, heritage, and kingdom.
 - iii. Light shines in the darkness and overcomes darkness. Christians have influence way beyond themselves.
 - iv. We are to bring out the God-colors in this world (MSG).
 - v. When Jesus calls his followers "the light of the world" and "a city on a hill," he is referencing images from the prophet Isaiah. The shining city on the hill portrays God's wisdom and heavenly presence emanating from Jerusalem and filling the whole Earth. By using these images, Jesus is applying Isaiah's prophecies to himself and his followers ([The Bible Project](#)).
- 2. **Main Section 2: Matthew 5:17 – 7:12. This is the main body of teaching. In this section, Jesus tells us what he means for his followers to be righteous. Righteousness is living in right relationship with God and others. It is a character trait that creates justice and peace in the world.**
 - a. **Section 1 of the Middle Section: Matthew 5:17 – 48. In this section, Jesus tells us how this righteousness relates to the Torah.**
 - i. **Matthew 5:17 – 20. Jesus fulfills the Torah.**
 - 1. Jesus' teaching on righteousness brings the Torah to its completion.
 - ii. **Matthew 5:21 – 32. Jesus gives six case studies on how the righteousness of Jesus fulfills the Torah**
 - 1. **Anger, lust, divorce, telling the truth, revenge, and enemy love.**
 - iii. **Matthew 5:33 – 48. Summary: be complete or whole. The purpose of the Torah is teaching people God's wisdom so that they can become mature, whole people who spread God's blessing to the world.**
 - 1. Being complete or whole links back to what Jesus says: living by Jesus' teachings will fulfill the Torah and Prophets.

- b. **Section 2 of the Middle Section:** Matthew 6:1 – 18. In this section, Jesus tells us how this righteousness relates to **religious practices**.
 - i. Matthew 6:1. Living in right relationship with God and other results in a reward.
 - 1. But be careful: If you are doing your righteousness to get public praise, you will miss out on the real reward God has in store.
 - ii. Matthew 6:2 – 18. Three examples of how religious devotion can go astray.
 - 1. Generosity to the poor.
 - 2. Prayer.
 - 3. Fasting.
 - iii. Matthew 6:19 – 21. True wealth: the real reward.
 - 1. The real reward links back to Matthew 6:1. The reward is knowing and being loved by God.
- c. **Section 3 of the Middle Section.** Matthew 6:19 – 7:12. In this section, Jesus tells us how **this righteousness is expressed in right relationships with God and with neighbor**. Doing righteousness affects our relationship with God and neighbor.
 - i. Matthew 6:19 – 34. God and money.
 - 1. Our stuff tends to claim our allegiance and causes us to worry.
 - 2. Our relationship to our stuff can be one of the biggest obstacles to healthy relationships with God and others.
 - 3. Store up treasure in heaven.
 - 4. **Parable 1: Two eyes.** You can have a healthy, generous eye, or an evil, stingy eye.
 - 5. **Parable 2: Two masters you can serve—God or money.**
 - 6. Teaching on worry. We are invited to trust the generous God of creation who cares about us.
 - ii. Matthew 7:1 – 11. God and neighbor.
 - 1. Teaching on not judging others.
 - 2. Parable 1: Speck and log.
 - 3. Parable 2: Holy pearls—using discernment when we try to help and correct others.
 - 4. Ask God for the wisdom you need: ask, seek, and knock.
 - iii. Matthew 7:12. The Golden Rule.
- 3. **Main Section 3:** Matthew 7:13 – 27. In his conclusion, **Jesus calls people to make a choice as to how they are going to respond**.
 - a. The choice for how we will live our lives.
 - i. Matthew 7:13 – 14. Two paths with two different gates. One leads to life; the other leads to ruin.

- ii. Matthew 7:15 – 23. Two trees. Discerning between two kinds of leaders who claim to represent God. One tree is good; one is not.
 - iii. Matthew 7:24 – 27. Two types of houses you can build. You can ignore Jesus and build your house by your own wisdom. Or, you can listen to Jesus and build your house on the rock.
4. **Finally, every one of these parts has 3 parts.**
- a. There is a lot of design in the structure of The Sermon on the Mount.

5. **Review of The Sermon on the Mount:**

- a. **Kingdom Identity:** the sermon begins with a surprise announcement about how the good life of the kingdom of God has come to the least likely people.
- b. **A Greater Righteousness:** in the main body, Jesus teaches how to do right by God and others.
- c. **The Choice:** the conclusion calls for a decision. In light of what Jesus has said, what choice will you make?

Here is what Jesus is saying through The Sermon on the Mount.

1. God's Kingdom comes to Earth through Jesus.
2. In God's Kingdom, love, justice, and peace prevail.
3. This Kingdom is arriving first to ordinary people—the poor, the powerless, and the outsider ([The Bible Project](#), Weekly Playlist, January 1-7).

Prayer:

1. Lord, I pray that you speak to us, encounter us, and grant to us your Spirit of wisdom and revelation that we might know you better.
2. Bless our time in your word together corporately.
3. Bless our time in your word individually as a part of our spiritual practices.
4. Help us to hear your voice, God, by the power of your Holy Spirit.
5. Help us to fall more and more in love with you, and help us to join Jesus on his mission together with others in our spheres of influence.
6. May we be a people who follow Jesus, who listen to the voice of God, and who get in action around what the Lord is saying through the power of his Holy Spirit.

Let's continue our look at the second Main Section of the Sermon on Mount. In Matthew 5:21 – 32, Jesus gives six case studies on how the righteousness of Jesus fulfills the Torah: anger, lust, divorce, telling the truth, revenge, and enemy love.

Murder and angry contempt:

Matthew 5:21 You have heard that it was said to the ancients, "You will not murder," and "Whoever murders will be guilty by the court." 22 And I say to you, that anyone who is angry with his brother will be guilty by the court; and whoever calls his brother "good-for-nothing" will be guilty by the Sanhedrin; and whoever says "fool!" will be guilty of the fire of gehenna. ([The Bible Project Translation of the Sermon on The Mount](#)).

Matthew 5:21–22 (NIV84) 21 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

[The BibleProject Guide](#)

1. **Imagine a world where everyone treats each other with dignity and respect.** And when problems do arise, everyone works hard to do right by each other. In the Bible, this way of treating each other is called righteousness. It sounds great, but how are we supposed to know how to do right by others? Jesus, like any Israelite teacher, believed that you can learn righteousness through studying God's wisdom in the ancient Scriptures, the Torah and the Prophets. Jesus believed that meditating on the laws given to ancient Israel would reveal God's wisdom.
2. **The Bible's ancient laws can teach us how to do right by each other, even today.** Jesus illustrates this in the Sermon on the Mount by quoting a command from the Torah and then revealing God's wisdom underneath the command.
3. The Old Testament laws about murder, adultery, and divorce reveal God's wisdom about how we treat others. **Jesus teaches that righteousness means treating all humans with dignity because we are all made in the image of God.**

The mismatch of crimes and punishment in Matthew 5:22

Matthew 5:21 You have heard that it was said to the ancients, "You will not murder," and "Whoever murders will be guilty by the court."

1. The direct quotation of one of the ten commandments leaves no doubt as to who were the “people long ago” to whom “it was said.” Jesus is going to the heart of the Mosaic law itself. The [Septuagint] LXX wording of Exod 20:13; Deut 5:17 correctly uses phoneuō, which like the Hebrew rāṣaḥ refers specifically to “murder,” the intentional and unlawful taking of life, rather than a more general word for “kill.” The following clause [whoever murders will be guilty by the court] does not cite a specific text, but summarizes the OT prescription of the death penalty for murder, as expressed for example, in Gen 9:6; Exod 21:12–14; Lev 24:17; Num 35:30–31. (France, R. T. *The Gospel of Matthew*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007.)
2. In Matthew 5:22, Jesus goes behind the act of murder itself to declare that the anger and hatred which give rise to it, though not capable of being examined in a human court, are no less culpable in the sight of God. France, R. T. *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 1. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985.)
3. *Subject to judgement* (NIV): The reference is probably, in the light of the Old Testament background, to judgment by a human court, but the next verse will go beyond this to the divine judgment. (France, R. T. *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 1. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985.)
4. So, in contrast with the human court’s verdict on murder in v. 21, Jesus here threatens ultimate divine judgment on anger, even as expressed in everyday insults. (France, R. T. *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 1. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985.)
5. The deliberate paradox of Jesus’ pronouncement is thus that ordinary insults may betray an attitude of contempt which God takes extremely seriously. (France, R. T. *The Gospel of Matthew*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007.)
6. Murder is a way downstream response of a heart posture towards others that began long away upstream. And that's what Jesus is focusing on, here. And the shocker, I mean the jaw-dropper, that Jesus is going for, is the moment of matching calling someone an idiot with the Gehenna of fire. ([How Is Anger the Same as Murder?](#) The [BibleProject Podcast](#).)
7. **How do we understand what Jesus means?**
 - a. And I think it's important to see the Hebrew Bible roots of what happened in this valley [of Gehenna] was so notorious, and so horrific, that it became a symbol. [It was] such a sad, tragic symbol, of God bringing on these leaders of Jerusalem, what they did to others. And that left such a mark in Israel's memory, that this valley became the

symbol to talk about the ultimate inversion of history, when God brings upon evil doers what they have done to others

The paradox and the understanding:

1. **There is a de-escalating level of intensity of expression and an increasing level of consequences:**
 - a. **From a de-escalating intensity of expression:** from **murderous rage** (internal anger) to **public shaming** (public expression that is insulting and shaming) to a **lesser insult**.
 - b. **To an ascending level of intensity of the consequences:** local court, Supreme Court (Sanhedrin), God's court (fire of Gehenna).
2. **It is as if you go from most significant to least significant in terms of actions. And, you go from the least significant to most significant in terms of consequences.**
 - a. Anyone who is angry with his brother will be guilty by the court (**local court**). **Internal rage**.
 - b. Whoever calls his brother "Raca" or "good-for-nothing" will be guilty or answerable to the Sanhedrin (**Supreme Court**). **Public shaming**.
 - c. Whoever says "fool" will be guilty of the fire of Gehenna (**God's court**). **A slight jab** like "you fool" or "you idiot."
3. **What is Jesus doing?**
 - a. **Jesus is scrambling our brains to get us to understand what is really behind murderous rage.**
 - i. Think of the story of Cain and Able.
 - ii. *Genesis 4:2–8 (NIV84) ... Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. 4 But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. 6 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." 8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.*
 - b. **There is an attitude or a posture towards the value of other human beings that underlies all these behaviors:** murderous rage, public shaming, and insults.
 - i. God takes seriously our heart attitude.

- ii. The deliberate paradox of Jesus' pronouncement is thus that **ordinary insults may betray an attitude of contempt which God takes extremely seriously.** (France, R. T. The Gospel of Matthew. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007.)
 - iii. Murder is a way downstream response of a heart posture towards others that began long ago or way upstream.
4. **What is the fire of Gehenna?**
- a. Most English Bibles translate Matthew 5:22 with the word "hell."
 - b. But the word used here is "Gehenna," which comes for the Hebrew phrase *gey'-hinnon*. This word refers to a valley in Jerusalem where two ancient Israelite kings sacrificed their children in the fire to other gods (2 Chronicles 28 & 33).
 - c. The prophet Jeremiah condemned this practice.
 - d. The prophets said that one day God would turn these fires back on the kings (see Jeremiah 19). One day, God would bring the kings' violence back on them in the same valley. This word was fulfilled when Babylon conquered Jerusalem.
 - e. Jesus uses this image to describe God's just response to evil.
 - f. If you are going to bring fire and destruction to others, then you are lighting a fire that will be the thing that ultimately undoes you.
5. **What is Jesus saying in Matthew 5:21-22?**
- a. Within the Old Testament command to not murder, Jesus reveals God's wisdom about how we view and treat others.
 - b. Jesus connects anger and insults with murder because they come from a heart posture of contempt, which is harmful at any level.
 - c. True righteousness means treating every human as an image of God who is to be loved and respected.

First parable about reconciliation:

Matthew 5:23–24 (NIV84) 23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."

1. **If God will punish anger, we cannot worship him with grudges unsettled.** The prophets made much of the futility of worship without a corresponding purity of life (e.g. Isa. 1:10–17; Jer. 7:8–11; Amos 5:21–24; Mic. 6:6–8; cf. Ps. 24:3–4). **Jesus elsewhere demanded a forgiving attitude of those who sought God's forgiveness** (6:14–15; 18:21–35). Here it is the worshipper himself who is at fault, and who therefore has it in his power to put matters right. Only so is his

worship acceptable. The gift is presumably an animal sacrifice, to offer which a layman was allowed to enter the Court of the Priests where the altar stood. Jesus' instruction to interrupt such a solemn occasion indicates the importance of the demand. Its application is of course far wider than the specific occasion of a sacrifice in the temple in Jerusalem, which would be a very rare, and therefore significant, experience for his Galilean audience. (France, R. T. *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 1. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985.)

2. The only "altar" at which an offering could be made was that of the temple in Jerusalem. This saying, presumably uttered in Galilee, thus envisages a worshipper who has traveled some eighty miles to Jerusalem with his "offering" (probably a sacrificial animal), who then leaves the animal in the temple while he makes a journey of a week or more to Galilee and back again in order to effect a reconciliation with his offended brother or sister before he dares to present his offering. The improbability of the scenario emphasizes Jesus' point, that the importance of right relationships demands decisive action. This, then, is the positive counterpart to the anger and abuse condemned in v. 22. It puts in the form of a vivid practical example the principle which Paul lays down in Eph 4:26: "Do not let the sun go down on your anger." (France, R. T. *The Gospel of Matthew*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007.)

Second parable about reconciliation:

Matthew 5:25–26 (NIV84) 25 "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. 26 I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny."

1. A further illustration stresses the urgency of reconciliation. A grievance unsettled can lead, in human terms, to court and to prison. But in this context it is improbable that Jesus was giving no more than prudential advice. The solemn truly, I say to you (see on 5:18) suggests a less trivial purpose; the parallel in Luke 12:58–59 is in a context of eschatological urgency, and the other parable of debt and imprisonment (Matt. 18:23–35) is also concerned with God's punishment of the unmerciful. Following the stress on God's judgment on anger in v. 22, this short parable (it should not be taken as a detailed allegory) warns that neglected grievances can have irrevocable consequences, and time may be short. The last penny (the quadrans, the smallest Roman coin) indicates that

God's judgment, if not forestalled by repentance and reconciliation, knows no half-measures. (France, R. T. *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 1. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985.)

2. This is another illustration of the importance of reconciliation, set in a different and more threatening scenario. In the preceding saying the disciple is seen as freely taking the initiative to effect a reconciliation. Here he is under duress. The "opponent" is apparently a legal plaintiff who has a case likely to lead to the disciple's conviction, probably for debt. A settlement out of court is a more prudent option, and the prospect of imprisonment until the debt has been cleared provides a compelling incentive. This little cameo is designed, like many parables, not to give practical advice for legal disputes (no indication is given as to what sort of settlement might be possible if the money is not available) but simply to reinforce an ethical message: do not allow bad relationships to remain unresolved. It is linked with vv. 21–22 by the theme of good relationships rather than bad, though the prudential focus of the parable-story sounds almost banal by comparison. But the inclusion of "I tell you truly" (see on 5:18) alerts us to a more ultimate purpose than merely avoiding imprisonment; like the other parable of debt and imprisonment (18:23–35) it is a pointer to the divine judgment on those whose earthly relationships do not conform to the values of the kingdom of heaven. Luke similarly sets his parallel to this saying (Luke 12:58–59) in a context of eschatological readiness. (France, R. T. *The Gospel of Matthew*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007.)

Conclusion:

Our identity: We are a people who follow Jesus, who listen to the voice of God, and who get in action around what the Lord is saying through the power of his Holy Spirit.

For reflection:

1. What is God saying to you?
2. What is getting stirred up in you?
3. Where do you sense resistance?
4. What questions do you have?
5. What are you feeling or thinking?
6. What is at least one takeaway for you today?