

The Sermon on the Mount Part 12: Warnings about Religious Practices Matthew 6:1-18

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 11'10'24, we worked on **an overview** of The Sermon on the Mount.

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.**

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.

In a message on 11'16'25, we looked at Matthew 5:21-26 which dealt with **murder and angry contempt.** True righteousness means treating every human as an image of God who is to be loved and respected.

In a message on 11'30'25, we looked at Matthew 5:27-30 which dealt with adultery and lust. The Old Testament law about adultery reveals God's wisdom about how we reduce people to objects of desire. **Jesus invites us to view every human being as an image of God who is to be honored in our actions and imaginations.**

In a message on 2'22'26, we looked at Matthew 5:31-32 which dealt with divorce and remarriage. Jesus sides with the interpreters teaching that a man may not divorce his wife for just any reason he chooses. **The Lord calls out the harm that is done to women in this scenario by identifying them as the victims of adultery.**

In a message on 3'15'26, we looked at Matthew 5:33-37, which dealt with oaths and telling the truth. Instead of seeking to embellish our words and to trying to manipulate others by making religious sounding oaths, **Jesus calls us to embrace honesty, telling the truth, and integrity.**

In a message on 3'22'26, we looked at Matthew 5:38-48, which dealt with retaliation (revenge) and enemy love. **Regarding retaliation, Jesus raises the bar when he says to respond to revenge and retaliation with creative nonviolence.** Jesus is not telling us to do nothing. Rather, Jesus raises the bar in his kingdom for creative and nonviolent responses that open the door for real peace. **Regarding enemy love, Jesus commands us to love our enemies.** It may sound crazy, but Jesus is saying that bold generosity can subvert the power games of our world and even turn enemies into friends.

As we make this journey, 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 Grieved (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 – 47. 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 5:48. 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 love 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.

Remember, righteousness is living in right relationship with God and others. It is a character trait that creates justice and peace in the world.

In Section 2 of the Middle Section, Matthew 6:1 – 18, **Jesus tells us how this righteousness relates to religious practices.**

1. Matthew 6:1. **Living in right relationship with God and other results in a reward.**
 - a. But be careful: If you are doing your righteousness to get public praise, you will miss out on the real reward God has instore.
2. Matthew 6:2 – 18. **Three examples of how religious devotion can go astray.**
 - a. Generosity to the poor.
 - b. Prayer.
 - c. Fasting.

[BibleProject Guide: Warnings about Religious Practices](#)

Matthew 6:1-18 provides the second main block of teaching within a larger, three-part literary unit where Jesus emphasizes righteousness in the Kingdom of God (found in Matthew 5:17-7:6). In the first part, Matthew 5:17-48, Jesus explores the idea of righteousness, or doing right by others. **Then, in Matthew 6:1-18, he focuses on doing right by God as he describes three common**

religious practices—giving, praying, and fasting. Jesus warns his listeners about practicing these things in a hypocritical, performative way to be seen by others. Instead, Jesus encourages true devotion born out of a desire for intimacy with God and alignment with his will.

The Danger of Religious Hypocrisy

In Jesus' day (and still today), people face temptation to perform religious acts like praying, fasting, and giving in order to gain social honor. Their efforts to relate to God are motivated by personal praise or being seen as holy or righteous. So Jesus teaches his followers about that temptation.

Matthew 6:1 (NASB) "Take care not to practice your righteousness in the sight of people, to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven."

These actions might resemble strong devotion to God, and they may even temporarily increase social status or applause. But they bring no lasting reward. Jesus describes this way of doing righteous deeds for social approval as the way of the *hypokrites* (Greek for "hypocrites"), which referred to actors on a stage. Jesus then focuses on three of the most popular ways to display righteousness before others: praying, fasting, and generous giving.

Jesus taught that the good life flows out of a close, intimate relationship with God. Jesus also lived in a culture where it was easy to turn intimacy with God into a performance to receive praise. To describe this kind of behavior, Jesus uses the word "hypocrite." We typically view a hypocrite as someone who says they believe one thing but doesn't reflect the beliefs in their actions. But Jesus uses this word "hypocrite" to refer to someone who does the right things for the wrong reasons. To help us avoid this kind of hypocrisy, Jesus offers three case studies on the most common religious practices of his day: generosity, prayer, and fasting. Jesus values these practices, and he encourages us to find creative ways of expressing our devotion so that we don't treat God's love like a trophy. ([The BibleProject](#), [The Sermon on the Mount](#), [Playlist 26 Spiritual Practices and Rewards](#).)

Generosity

Jesus begins with the example of generosity by saying:

Matthew 6:2 (NASB) "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, so that they will be praised by people. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. In Jesus' culture, public displays of generosity were a way to celebrate God's generous love, but they could also become a way to promote oneself. So Jesus offers an alternative. 3 But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing...."

Giving in ways that others cannot see is a foolproof way to ensure your generosity is motivated by love. But Jesus also taught earlier, in the same sermon, that people should not hide their light and good works, letting them shine as an example for others.

Matthew 5:14-16 (NASB) 14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15 nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Your light must shine before people in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

So which one does Jesus want us to follow? Both of these behaviors have their place in the good life. And Jesus isn't offering black and white rules—he's **offering wisdom**. It's our job to discern when to let our good works be seen and when to keep them hidden. **All of our actions should be motivated by a desire to bless and care for others**. It is then that we will display the real heartbeat of God's love.

Illustrations of living generously:

- Mark 12:17:22
- Mark 12:41-44
- Matthew 13:44
- Luke 12:13-21
- Luke 12:33
- Acts 20:35

In light of all of these encouragements to live with generosity, Jesus still challenges us to be careful and honest with ourselves. If there's even a hint of desire for others to see how much we are giving, or whom we're giving to, it's probably wise for us to give in secret.

It may be easier if Jesus gave one clear rule. **But by giving us this wisdom, Jesus invites us to cultivate a closer relationship with God**, trusting that as we learn to

operate in his ways with real love for our neighbors, we will know when it is helpful to give in private or more publicly.

In Jesus' day, it was common to show generosity in order to receive honor—like getting your name on a plaque. But Jesus encourages us to be generous in ways where we are not the focus. Generosity seeks to lift up others instead of ourselves. ([The BibleProject](#), [The Sermon on the Mount](#), [Playlist 27 Don't Give to Get the Plaque](#). See also: [What Are "Rewards in Heaven" in the Bible?](#))

Prayer

In his second case study, Jesus makes the same point about praying in public versus praying in private.

Matthew 6:5 (NASB) "And when you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they will be seen by people. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full."

In Jesus' culture, people traditionally prayed the Shema from the Torah every sunrise and sunset. Jesus was also known for his consistent devotion to prayer. However, he never prayed publicly in order to promote himself. Be careful, he says, because even your prayer habits can become a strategy for gaining public favor.

Imagine the temptation to "conveniently" find yourself on a busy street corner when prayer time comes—the perfect moment to show lots of people how serious you are about following God. People may be impressed, seeing your devotion and faithfulness. And if that's what you're after, you'll probably get it! But that's really all you get. Jesus says there's a better, more-lasting reward.

Matthew 6:6 (NASB) But as for you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

Prayer is about spending time with and turning our attention to God. In prayer, we share thoughts and concerns with God, trusting that he always hears and responds in ways that work for our good. One good way to check our motives is to pray when no one can see or hear. But again, this isn't a static rule but one part of a deeper wisdom. Jesus prayed alone often and also with his followers

and in front of large public audiences. Both are important ways of connecting to God, but neither should be done out of motivation for self-promotion.

Fasting

The third case study is focused on fasting.

Matthew 6:16 (NASB) "Now whenever you fast, do not make a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they distort their faces so that they will be noticed by people when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full."

Fasting is the practice of intentionally refraining from food, drink, or certain actions while inviting God to meet us and sustain us. Fasting is kind of like praying with our bodies, and it's intended to foster stronger bonds of trust with God. But even fasting can be used as a performance. So Jesus once again advises people to be honest about their motives. He even tells them to clean themselves up while they're fasting, so they avoid any attempt to garner people's sympathy by looking exhausted or pained:

Matthew 6:17-18 (NASB) 17 But as for you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 so that your fasting will not be noticed by people but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

Summary:

Notice that in all three cases [generosity, prayer, and fasting], Jesus does not say people should ditch these practices. Instead, he encourages everyone to find creative ways to express devotion so that they don't treat their love for God like a trophy. Jesus knows his followers will be most effective in the world when they care the least about social status and the most about following in the way of God's generous love.

Reminder:

Spiritual practices help us to focus on God first, above all else, to seek God first. God himself is our great reward.

Spiritual practices remove the illusion that God is absent.

For spiritual practices to have impact and fruitfulness in our lives, they need to be engaged **intentionally** (planning, structure) and **relationally** (not just out of duty... it can begin as a duty, but is meant **to help us connect with Immanuel, God with us**), and with **intensity** (effort, energy).

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?

Ministry Time.

Introduction: From The Bible Project, [What is the Sermon on the Mount?](#)

The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' most well-known teaching....

Emphasizing humility, forgiveness, and generous care for our neighbors, Jesus encourages people to choose God's way of love, which will eventually renew all of creation. He calls this restored world God's Kingdom. This is a realm in which Heaven and Earth are inseparably combined, a place where life flourishes that's free from injustice, suffering, and death.

We're not sure if Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount as one big speech or if Matthew collected Jesus' key teachings over time and organized them into a sermon-style scene (recorded in Matthew 5-7). Either way, this sermon contains some of the most rigorous ethical demands in the Bible. It has wild ideas like "blessed are the peacemakers" and "love your enemies" and "pray for people who persecute you."

These ideas might pass for utopian ideals, but they're nonsense (and weak) in our modern empires, where leadership usually means strength and power more than vulnerability and love.

Matthew compares Jesus to Moses but takes care to show he's not the same as Moses, nor is his instruction a simple repeat of Moses' law. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus says he is not abolishing what Moses gave; he's "filling it full." Jesus' teaching deepens and expands that first instruction (Hebrew: torah) from Moses. (The Bible Project, [What is the Sermon on the Mount?](#))

Matthew compares Jesus to Moses but takes care to show he's not the same as Moses, nor is his instruction a simple repeat of Moses' law. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus says he is not abolishing what Moses gave; he's "filling it full." Jesus' teaching deepens and expands that first instruction (Hebrew: torah) from Moses.

Throughout the biblical story, God instructs people in many ways, but two teachers—Moses and Jesus—become primary human instructors. Moses was the only one who experienced God face-to-face (Exod. 33:11), and Jesus is God himself in the flesh. In Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, through Jesus, God shows up like a new Moses, arriving to rescue not only all of Israel but all of humanity.

As such, Matthew casts Jesus not only as a new Moses but also as a greater Moses. Somehow, in a speech where Jesus never tells people to respect him or

to bow down, the crowds still recognize strong authority in Jesus' words. His teaching seems to have the ring of truth, and it fits with the Hebrew Bible's instruction they already know, yet it leaves them utterly astonished (Matt. 7:28).

Jesus is disrupting the common expectations of their world. Moses' teaching also disrupted the common expectations of the Egyptian empire and its Hebrew slaves. Moses taught an enslaved people to become free, not by turning to violence but by turning their attention to God and following his lead—trusting his instruction—which becomes a core theme in the Exodus narrative. That had to sound crazy to enslaved people. Just follow God and trust him to deal with their enemies? But they did, and God set them free as promised.

Like most of us throughout history, the crowds listening to Jesus assume that evil gets eradicated from our world with strong military power and the wealth it takes to build armies. But Jesus goes nowhere near that or an idea that depends on force, coercion, or violence. He promises with his life that the power of God's love, along with those who choose to embrace it, will eventually outlast and overwhelm all evil everywhere.

Don't fight evil with the power of evil, Jesus says. Instead, join God in creating goodness throughout the land. If Jesus' followers listen to his words, they will start seeing their enemies as neighbors and miracles of God who are worthy of love. All evil and every oppressor will ultimately be defeated, Jesus teaches, not with swords but with God's creative, renewing love.

Moses' law had always been pointing in this exact same direction. It always intended to form its followers into loving people who honor God by blessing every family on Earth (see Genesis 12:1-3). Jesus is now making good on that intent by finishing—or filling full—the work that Moses' instruction started.

How Jesus' Teaching "Fills Full" the Torah

In Matthew 5:17-43, Jesus opens six repeated statements with these words: "You have heard it said, and I say to you" The first part, "you have heard it said," refers to the original Torah. Some thought Jesus opposed that first instruction, but Jesus emphatically says the opposite. He doesn't think the old law is flawed or obsolete. It was limited in its scope, and he's providing fuller explanation and illustration.

Though the first law did intend to form the human heart, its instructions could be followed in vain—interpreted and followed in a way that had no meaningful

effect on the follower. For instance, Jesus agrees with Moses' prohibition against murder, but his teaching suggests that avoiding murder is only a surface-level goal. One can be considerate or non-violent while still harboring contempt and hate for others. But hateful hearts won't function in the Kingdom of God, even if they are well-behaved. So, Jesus refocuses his listeners to consider their actual hearts and to honestly pay attention to whom and what they truly love.

Real human life and goodness, as Jesus describes it, is not about a simple rejection of murder; it's about actively loving every person around you, regardless of their status as friend or enemy. Jesus teaches impartial love for all neighbors (not some neighbors). Jesus' life fulfills the law, and Jesus' teaching fulfills the law—he fills Moses' Torah full.

What's This "Kingdom" Jesus Talks About?

Think about an average neighborhood or village. Imagine if, one by one, its citizens started making decisions to bless one another with resources rather than hoard and fight over them. Imagine what it would be like if society at large considered vulnerability and kindness to be the highest forms of power and glory. It's a world where mutual love between citizens has made it impossible for evil to continue.

Total peace. Total safety. Total provision. Everyone experiencing the good life.

"The good life belongs to [or 'blessed are'] those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," Jesus says in the introduction of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:6). That word "righteousness" comes from the Greek *dikaiosisune*, which is about right relating with others. To be a righteous person, according to Jesus and the New Testament, we must learn how to relate rightly with all people. In other words, we learn how to love our neighbors.

Jesus says that the good life belongs to people who hunger and thirst for right relationships "because they will be filled [or 'satisfied']." They will, according to God's promise, eventually live in a world where Heaven and Earth are united, where everyone else wants right relationships too—this is God's Kingdom. Surely many in Jesus' crowds wanted to be there now.

Notice how Jesus does not promise to take these oppressed Galileans from their bad situation straight to a better world by simply destroying their Roman oppressors. He's teaching them that a free world doesn't come about through harming or exterminating enemies. It comes about freely, through something more powerful.

He's helping them experience freedom within God's Kingdom right now by choosing to turn their attention to him and his way of love. This is why Jesus invites the people to "seek first the Kingdom" (Matt. 6:33)—to let his Sermon on the Mount instructions guide them through their wilderness, into the promised Kingdom way—and to want that more than anything.

Loving that way of life, he says, leads to a world where every need is met, every tear is wiped away, and every bit of life's goodness gets experienced by all people.

Don't allow worries about securing your basic needs govern the decisions you make, Jesus teaches. Instead, more than anything else, pursue God's Kingdom way of life and right relating with all others. When we do that, we'll find that life's biggest needs are no longer an issue (Matt. 6:31-33). When everyone lives like that, fear and violence don't make sense anymore because the world is altogether good. That good world is the Kingdom Jesus speaks of in his Sermon on the Mount.

How God's World Will Be Transformed

Moses joined God in this life-renewing work back in Egypt. And Matthew portrays Jesus as a new Moses to signal that Jesus is doing the same thing. He is continuing the rescuing work God started long ago. But he's introducing an unexpected trajectory through his Sermon on the Mount, opening humanity's eyes to the deeper meaning of Moses' Torah.

As it is, Jesus' teaching implies that the world won't be fixed through the elimination of human enemies or through merely escaping our world for a better utopia in the clouds. God's world—on Earth as it is in Heaven—will be transformed by changed human hearts. Jesus' frustrated Galilean crowds were probably as unhappy to hear this as we likely are. They want God's power to destroy their enemies, not God's power to bless and heal and love them. In fact, Matthew says at the end that Jesus' crowds were utterly shocked, astounded, and amazed.

Despite hearing the most intense ethical teaching they had ever heard, far greater than any legal experts or religious elites, the people still somehow knew that Jesus spoke truth. And isn't it true for each of us that, deep down, we prefer kindness and love more than hate or contempt?

“When Jesus finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed by his teaching,” Matthew writes to conclude, “because Jesus taught them like one who had authority, not like their experts in the law” (Matt. 7:28, NET).

Sermon on the Mount Bible Project and other research 8'22'24

[The Bible Project](#)

NIV	ESV	The Bible Project
3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.	3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.	3 How good is life for the poor in spirit, because theirs is the kingdom of the skies.
4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.	4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.	4 How good is life for those who grieve, because they will be comforted.
5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.	5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.	5 How good is life for the unimportant, because they will inherit the land.
6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.	6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.	6 How good is life for those who hunger and thirst for right-relationships, because they will be satisfied.
7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.	7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.	7 How good is life for those who show mercy, because they will be shown mercy.
8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.	8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.	8 How good is life for the pure in heart, because they will see God.
9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.	9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.	9 How good is life for the peacemakers, because they will be called children of God.

<p>10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p>	<p>10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p>	<p>10 How good is life for those who have been persecuted on account of doing what is right, because theirs is the kingdom of the skies.</p>
<p>11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.</p>	<p>11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.</p>	<p>11 How good is life for you when they insult you and persecute and speak any evil lies against you on account of me.</p>
<p>12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.</p>	<p>12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.</p>	<p>12 Celebrate and shout for joy. Because your reward is great in the skies, because this is how they persecuted the prophets before you.</p>
<p>13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.</p>	<p>13 "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.</p>	<p>13 You are the salt of the land. But if the salt becomes unsalty, with what can it be made salty again? It is useful for nothing, except to be thrown out and stepped on by humans.</p>
<p>14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before</p>	<p>14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may</p>	<p>14 You are the light of the world. A city that is set up on a mountain is not able to be hidden. 15 And they don't light a candle and place it under a basket. Rather, upon a</p>

men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.	see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.	candle stand, and it will shine on everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before people so that they can see your good works and they can give honor to your Father who is in the skies.
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[The Bible Project: Matthew 5:14-16](#)

“Jesus is taking this image from the Hebrew prophet Isaiah, who said that one day, God’s heavenly reign will touch down on Earth in Jerusalem, high on a hill. And this city will reflect God’s light out into the nations, who will learn the ways of God and live in peace. It’s a heavenly city, and its light will be like the dawn of new creation.”

Highlight

“What Isaiah begins to anticipate is that if God’s purpose for Israel is ever going to happen, that calling, to walk in the light of Yahweh, to be a source of peace among the nations, is going to fall on the shoulders of one Israelite who is just called ‘the servant.’”

Salt

“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).

The Light and the City

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.

[Read - What Does It Mean to Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness?](#)

Of life's most basic needs, food, oxygen, and water rank high. We might add shelter to round out the "essentials" category, but Jesus would add one more—right relating with others. When he tells people to "hunger and thirst for righteousness," we may assume that he's talking about a personal desire for holiness. But righteousness, according to Jesus and the rest of the Bible, is about right relating in the ways of love. And in Matthew 5:6, Jesus suggests that loving others is a basic human need like eating food or drinking water.

In the opening lines of his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "How good is life for those who hunger and thirst for right relationships (righteousness), because they will be satisfied" (Matt. 5:6, Bible Project Translation).

Our English term "righteousness" comes from the Hebrew word *tzedakah* and the Greek word *dikaiousune*. Both terms carry weighty ideas like justice, generosity, and honesty, which all describe ways of right relating with others and with God.

Even if we understand what righteousness means, Matthew 5:6 still raises a key question: What does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness in the context of Jesus' teachings?

Radical as it sounds, Jesus' teaching is not new. In fact, this upside-down way of relating, which lifts others up rather than oppressing them in the name of personal gain, is woven throughout the whole story of the Bible, from beginning to end.

Righteousness in the Hebrew Bible

The world God created is shaped around intrinsic right relating (see Genesis 1). Male and female human beings walk with God, and he creates them as partners who bear God's image and care for the rest of creation. It's here that we get the first picture of righteousness—humanity's good relationship with God, each other, and the land they live on.

When Adam and Eve choose to ignore God's instruction and eat from the tree of knowing good and evil, it's a choice to stop relating well with God. Immediately, a seismic shift occurs in the way that they relate to each other and everything around them. Listen to Adam's response after God asks, "Did you eat from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" Adam says, "The woman whom you gave me, she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it" (Gen. 3:11-12, NET).

When God turns to Eve, she similarly deflects blame toward the serpent. Suddenly, man and woman become preoccupied with self-preservation in a way that requires the subjugation of one another and the world around them. Previously, the humans walked in right relationship with each other and their Creator; now, they hide from him and respond dishonestly to his questions. Even worse, they begin to die because right relating is essential to ongoing life.

Humanity's inherent desire for right relationships has since been replaced with fear and an appetite for personal protection and gain. We're taught to compete for resources and defend what we have, keeping others and enemies away at any cost.

But God didn't want to leave things this way, so he periodically gives instruction to people, like the law given to Israel through Moses. This law was intended to address humanity's destructive craving—a deadly kind of hungering and thirsting. The daily practice of Moses' law created rhythms of right relating with God and others that undermine self-centered ways of life. When people and whole communities follow these instructions, those routinely harmed or ignored by the power-hungry—the poor and powerless, widows and orphans—can find new life through the care shown to them by their neighbors.

Despite these instructions from God, humanity continues to pursue self-supremacy with the determination of a famished wolf searching for prey. In response, God persistently calls his people back to a way of right relating that will finally satiate their deepest longing.

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy, and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?” (Isa 55:1-2a, NIV)

Righteousness, Hunger, and Thirst in the Sermon on the Mount

Given how integral this idea of right relationship is to the Bible's story, it's not surprising that the theme takes center stage in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:20, 6:1, 6:33, 7:12). When Jesus sits down on the mountainside, surrounded by crowds of people, Jesus details a revolutionary way of life that's rooted in ancient wisdom from the Hebrew Bible. With his words, Jesus sets a table and invites those listening to experience a nourishing way of life that satisfies our longing for good relationships with all people. This is the kind of relating that defines Jesus' Kingdom way of life.

“How good is life for the poor in spirit,” Jesus says, “because theirs is the kingdom of the skies.” “How good is life,” he promises, “for the peacemakers” (Matt. 5:3, 9, BPT).

Jesus' tender words have transformative power, inviting us to abandon our hunger for self-sufficiency and power. Like loving parents gently lifting their child's gaze to meet their own, Jesus invites us to be transformed by a desire for right relationship with himself and one another. Be like me, he says. Allow your perspective of the world to be turned upside-down, and yearn for a new way of living and relating.

This kind of righteousness is about more than a personal moral code. According to Jesus, it is possible to become consumed with following rules without craving right relationships (Matt. 5:20). Jesus also confronts a group of Bible scholars who expertly adhere to the law while simultaneously oppressing the vulnerable (Matt. 23:1-36)! They're acting with evil while thinking they're the most righteous people in town.

Jesus says that real righteousness points back to the first garden and describes the ethic of God's Kingdom. This way of life is inspired not by an appetite for personal gain but by a hunger for love that compels a person to be fair and just toward others, to seek peace with all, and to generously give without restraint (see Matt. 5:38-42). Jesus lives like this without fail, and he invites everyone to join him in hungering for righteousness in our own lives and in our world.

This is what Jesus means when he says, "Rather, first of all seek for his kingdom and doing-what-is-right by him, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33, BPT).

Before presenting his listeners with this challenging promise, Jesus reassures them that God cares about their physical needs. "So then, don't worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'" He says, "For the nations, they constantly seek for all these things, and your Father in the skies knows that you need all that" (Matt. 6:31-32, BPT).

The message is at once simple and revolutionary. Jesus invites us to trust God with the substance of our daily existence, while simultaneously becoming consumed with a hunger for the right relationships of his Kingdom.

You Will Be Satisfied

When we trust that right relating with God and others is no less essential for life than food or water, Jesus teaches, our lives will be turned upside-down. We start living like we're already in God's Kingdom (and start experiencing a taste of its goodness). Throughout his time on Earth, Jesus was lifting the downtrodden and challenging those who sought power at the cost of the helpless. As an ultimate expression of this righteous way, Jesus willingly gives up his life. His death is at once a demonstration of

humanity's cruel hunger for power and God's boundless mercy, justice, and determined pursuit of right relationships.

Jesus calls us to push aside our craving for personal gain and become like him. He promises that our hunger for this way of life will not leave us wanting: "How good is life for those who hunger and thirst for right relationships, because they will be satisfied" (Matt. 5:6, BPT). Did you catch it? He's saying that if we become hungry for right relating with others, we will eventually be satisfied. All of restored humanity will live in a flourishing world where no human being does harm or relates poorly to another.

That's the home everyone was built for. If we hunger for that, we will be satisfied. Through his way of life and teaching, Jesus is slowly but surely changing our hearts, teaching us to love one another like he does and leading us to an incorruptible home where right relating—righteousness—will be our daily fare.

Other resources:

Pure Heart: Restoration of the Heart Through the Beatitudes, Tom and Donna Cole. From Margaret.

The Pure Shall See God, Francis Frangipane. From Louis Posthauer.

Sam Storms. *Biblical Studies: The Sermon on the Mount*. Edmond, OK. 2016.