

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Lesson 3 – Study Questions

Matthew 5:1-48

Review: *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

DAY ONE

Read Matthew 5:1-3

NOTE: Today's lesson begins with the first of the 5 great discourses, the Sermon on the Mount. Each of the five discourses conclude with the formula "When Jesus finished these words" or one closely similar (Mt 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). In every case the discourse is preceded by a narrative section, each narrative and discourse together constituting a "book" of the gospel. In the Sermon on the Mount the theme of righteousness is prominent, and even at this early stage of the ministry the note of opposition is struck between Jesus and the Pharisees, who are designated as "the hypocrites" (Mt 6:2, 5, 16). (*USCCB, Introduction to The Gospel According to Matthew*) As noted in our Commentary, the Sermon on the Mount is probably the best known and most quoted part of the gospel. Luke has a comparable version, but sets it on a plain, where Matthew places it on a mountain.

1. Jesus has attracted great crowds with his preaching and healing. According to verse 1, when he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain and began to teach them with the Beatitudes. Look up one or two definitions for the word "beatitude."

2. Our Commentary cites nine beatitudes. Before we begin our in-depth study, complete the blessings below:

First Beatitude "Blessed are

Second Beatitude "Blessed are

Third Beatitude "Blessed are

Fourth Beatitude "Blessed are

Fifth Beatitude "Blessed are

Sixth Beatitude "Blessed are

Seventh Beatitude “Blessed are

Eighth Beatitude “Blessed are

Ninth Beatitude “Blessed are

NOTE: The “poor in spirit” are those who are humble, those who depend upon God completely, for every good, both bodily and spiritual. It includes detachment from material things and practicing restraint in using them. Jesus is our model. When the Son of God became man, he chose the path of poverty and self-emptying.

3. Why do you think that Jesus selected “poor in spirit” to be the first Beatitude?

4. As noted in our Commentary, the Beatitudes “have echoes in Wisdom literature and the prophets.” Read and record one of the following and comment on how it reminds you of a beatitude.

Proverbs 3:5

Proverbs 28:14

Isaiah 30:18

5. CONNECTION: Our culture encourages self-sufficiency and independence but as Christians we are called to empty ourselves of the things of this world, become poor in spirit, and put our trust and dependence on God. What are some of the difficulties faced in detaching from worldly things? Can you share an example of someone who has been successful at this?

Read Matthew 6:19-20 and pray today that you may truly be fully dependent upon God and storing up treasures in heaven rather than on earth.

DAY TWO

Read Matthew 5:4-7

NOTE: The beatitudes are promises that God has made to humanity. Some of these promises are fulfilled in every age; mourners are comforted each day. Others will only find fulfillment in the fullness of God’s kingdom. Jesus searched the Scriptures to craft this message. He found promises that God had made to Israel in the past and made them relevant to present circumstances. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, for example, God repeatedly affirms his care for the poor. Isaiah promised divine comfort to mourners (Is 61:2-3). The Psalms promise that the meek will inherit (Ps 37:11), that those who hunger and thirst will be satisfied (Ps 107:5-9) and that the pure of heart will ascend to the Lord (Ps 24:3-4).

Jesus reached deep into his tradition to find words of comfort that were meaningful to the people he served. *America Magazine, What Beatitudes Does Our World Need to Hear Today?*, Michael Simone, S.J.

6. “Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.” What true comfort to know that our Lord is with us when we grieve whether from the loss of loved ones or for our sins and the sins of humanity. We are also called to mourn together liturgically in penitential rites and during Lent. Mourning as a prayer can guide us into God’s comfort and love. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 and write your own prayer of mourning and hope.

7. “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.” Some may think of the word meek as interchangeable with weak; and yet, we are called not only to be humble and dependent on God, but also to be strong and courageous. Just as Jesus Christ was meek, and yet strong, so must we be. How can we combine meekness with strength in serving the Lord?

NOTE: Pope Francis said that this beatitude (blessed are the meek) is rooted in Psalms 37:3-11 which tells believers to trust in the Lord, refrain from anger, be patient and “make your righteousness shine” for then shall they “inherit the earth” and “delight in great prosperity.” The “land” the psalm refers to is something greater than some earthly territory, which is so often a source of conflict, war and aggression. That land...is heaven — that “new earth” that God has made for his children. *Pope Francis, General Audience, 2/19/20*

8. “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.” Our Commentary calls righteousness “a right relation with God, self, others, and all creation,” sought through faithfulness founded upon God’s gift of grace. To better understand this concept, complete Ephesians 2:8-10.

For by grace you have been saved
and this is not from you;
it is not from works,
For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus
that God has prepared in advance,
One in Christ.

9. “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” Forgiving others is often one of the most difficult things we do. Comment on how being more merciful could transform you.

10. CONNECTION: The Beatitudes, Pope St. John Paul II says in *Veritatis Splendor*, “are a sort of self-portrait of Christ, and for this very reason are invitations to discipleship and to communion of life with Christ.”

After prayerfully reflecting on one of the first five beatitudes, share how you might make changes in your life to receive the blessing Christ offers for that sacrifice.

Read and record James 4:10. Write a prayer today for the strength to make changes in your life that will be pleasing to God.

DAY THREE

Read Matthew 5:8-16

11. The next two beatitudes regard the pure of heart and the peacemakers. Briefly describe what the Commentary, page 34, says constitutes one who is pure hearted, and what must be learned in order to be a peacemaker.

Blessed are the pure in heart-

Blessed are the peacemakers-

12. Finally, the eighth beatitude (verse 10) circles back to righteousness, for which the disciples will be persecuted, and the ninth (verse 11) warns of the verbal abuse which will be suffered by the disciples because of Jesus. According to verse 12, what will they receive for their suffering and who else also suffered?

13. Jesus moves on in his teaching with familiar metaphors: his followers are the salt of the earth (verse 13) and the light of the world (verse 14). We, like Jesus, often refer to people who are anchors in our life as “salt of the earth.” Share with your small group someone you would describe as “salt of the earth” and why.

NOTE: Jesus is the light of a darkened Galilee (Mt 4:12-17) and now that function of enlightening and guiding a morally confused humanity is shared with the disciples...the ultimate goal, however, remains God-centered: the glory of the Father. *Meier, John P., Matthew*

14. Jesus also compares the disciples to a city on a mountain or a lamp giving light to all in the house. Light is lifegiving. Read and record verse 16 (Good memory verse).

15. CONNECTION: Through the Beatitudes, Jesus presents spiritual qualities that are counter to our current cultural understanding of a successful person. He wants us to reevaluate our understanding and accept his, knowing that we may be persecuted for it. Does the idea of being persecuted for your faith frighten you? Why or why not?

Read Deuteronomy 31:6 and write a prayer asking for the strength to persevere in your faith.

DAY FOUR

Read Matthew 5:17-32

NOTE: Jesus began his public ministry like a new Moses, climbing a mountain to give his disciples the new law of the kingdom of God. His opening “Beatitudes” point the way to true happiness and blessing in the kingdom. This can only be obtained by those who are humble, who mourn their sin, who submit their strength to God, and who hunger for righteousness and are merciful. In short, it may be obtained by those who reflect the image of Jesus himself. The Lord made it clear that, far from doing away with the old Law, he came to fulfill it. What he meant by this became clearer as he began to build upon the Beatitudes with six “antitheses,” contrasts between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant that reveal the underlying spirit of the new law. *Cavins and Christmyer, Matthew, The King and His Kingdom*

16. In verses 17-20, Jesus emphasizes that he is an observant Jew. Jesus is telling them he is not doing away with the Old Testament Scriptures, instead his coming was to fulfill the law and the prophecies. Unlike the scribes and Pharisees, who reduced God’s expectations to something they could externally manage, Jesus is encouraging us to obey from the heart. What does it mean to you to obey from the heart?

17. Jesus continues, using as an example of obeying from the heart, the commandment not to kill, pointing out that there is much more to killing than the murderous act itself. He tells us that we must work toward reconciliation, putting away anger. Choose one of the three examples he presents in verses 21-26 and briefly explain why Jesus relates it to killing:

Avoid insulting another-

Offering a sacrifice doesn’t take the place of fixing a broken relationship-

Don’t let conflicts escalate to litigation-

NOTE: The sign of peace has its liturgical and spiritual roots in Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness prior to offering gifts on the altar (Mt 5:23-24). That is, if someone has a grievance against his brother, he should first “be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” The sign of peace is a highly symbolic act that is meant to point towards the disposition of heart required for receiving the Holy Eucharist.

It reminds the faithful that in order to be in full communion with Christ, one must first “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength,” and not forget to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30-31). *Aleteia, History of the Sign of Peace*

18. Jesus’ point is that it is not enough for his disciples to avoid killing; they must actively seek to defuse anger and pursue right relation with all. This however does not address righteous anger. Briefly describe righteous anger. (see Commentary, page 37)

19. With verse 27, Jesus addresses the commandment not to commit adultery but extends it to “lusting in the heart” or coveting another’s spouse or belongings. Look up the definition of covetousness and give an example of how today’s culture perpetuates this sin.

NOTE: When Jesus was preaching in Galilee, divorce and remarriage was accepted in society. The law of Moses allowed for it (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). The teaching of Jesus that divorce and remarriage is not allowed was revolutionary. It was even an indication of his claim to divinity, for only God has the authority to over-rule the law of Moses...it can take great spiritual strength, and is certainly counter-cultural, to renew each day a sacred lifelong commitment, trusting in the grace of God. *Cardinal Thomas Collins, “Marriage, Divorce, and Communion, Word on Fire Interview*

20. CONNECTION: Jesus’ new laws greatly deepen the Old Covenant laws and they revolve around the greatest commandment, to love God above all else and to love our neighbor. (Mark 23:30-31). We presume we are loving people and yet the word “love” has been trivialized in our culture so often that we can lose sight of its real meaning. What is most difficult about loving our neighbor, as we are commanded?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and allow a phrase to lead you into writing a prayer.

DAY FIVE

Read Matthew 5:33-48

21. As Jesus continues to teach, he changes the focus to honesty in relationships. In verse 33 he cites Leviticus, which basically says don’t swear falsely in God’s name, as it profanes the name of God. Jesus extends this to mean any oath was binding: “let your yes mean yes and your no mean no.” Which of the Ten Commandments would this reflect?

22. Jesus' principle of nonretaliation overturns the Jewish law (Lev. 24:20) of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." After reading the four examples of nonretaliation, share what you think is best or most difficult about this principle.

23. Our Commentary reminds us that love as a commandment concerns not feelings but deeds that reflect faithfulness to the covenant. Once again Jesus takes the command further, requiring the love of enemies, including praying for persecutors. Read and record the reason Jesus gives from verse 45.

24. Jesus instructs us to be perfect, just as our heavenly Father is perfect (verse 48). From the Commentary, page 41, we are told that perfect does not mean moral perfection. What does it mean?

NOTE: Jesus tells the disciples to be "perfect" (verse 47), a word that, among the four gospels, occurs only in Matthew. To be perfect not only sums up the love-command, but also harks back to the beatitudes and the pure in heart in particular. Verse 48 recapitulates the entire moral teaching of Chapter 5. To be perfect is not the ideal of the monk; it is the obligation of every Christian. *Meier*

25. CONNECTION: Jesus has painted a picture of the Father which shows he loves without limit and instructs us to do so as well. "His disciples, 'the sons of this Father,' must prove their legitimacy by showing the family likeness, which means loving with the all-embracing love their Father bestows." (*Meier*) Jesus doesn't expect us to come to him as "perfect" but to continue to grow in love and holiness. How can we put this into practice in our relationships with others?

Begin your prayer today asking that Jesus help you to continue to transform your hearts and become more like him in thought and in practice.

FINAL QUESTION for the WEEK

Which of Jesus' teachings in this lesson were most meaningful to you and why?

Read pages 32-41 in the *New Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Gospel According to Matthew* by *Barbara E. Reid, O.P.* The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE) ©2010, 1991, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.

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