

WALKING WITH JESUS - PART 1

Testimony from the Mountain

Dr. Derek Morris

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| Preaching passage: | Matthew 5:1-2 |
| Subject: | What Jesus did when He sat down on the mountainside in Galilee |
| Complement: | He taught His disciples the principles of the kingdom of heaven |
| Exegetical idea: | When Jesus sat down on the mountainside in Galilee, He taught His disciples the principles of the kingdom of heaven.. |
| Homiletical idea: | Jesus wants you to walk with Him! |
| Purpose: | In this first-person narrative sermon, as James the son of Zebedee, I intend to encourage my hearers to respond to the invitation of Jesus to walk with Him and be a part of His Kingdom. |

Introduction

Shabbat shalom! My name is James, son of Zebedee. I am a fisherman from the city of Bethsaida. My father is a fisherman, as was his father before him. Our family operates a very successful fishing business on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. People in Bethsaida say that my father Zebedee is such a good fisherman that fish tremble at the sound of his name! Zebedee!!

I thought that I would spend the rest of my days toiling with nets on the sea of Galilee. But all of my plans have changed. The Word of the LORD through the prophet Jeremiah has been fulfilled. The LORD our God has given me a future and a hope! My life has been set on a new course, and I'm not turning back!

May I share my story with you? As I mentioned earlier, I come from the city of Bethsaida, on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Ever since I can remember, my father Zebedee has trained me to be a fisherman. And my father trained my brother too. His name is John. My brother and I would constantly fight when we were boys, but John has always been my best friend. We're not exactly the same, though. My brother John has always been more

spiritually minded than me. I was preoccupied with how to maximize our catch of fish or how to get the best prices at the market. John was always seeking to know the LORD our God and to walk in harmony with His Word.

More than a year ago, perhaps it's even longer than that—so much has happened in the last few months—my brother John headed south to the region where John the Baptist was baptizing in the river Jordan. I'm not sure if my brother went first to Perea, on the east side of the Jordan river, or to Judea on the west side of the Jordan river. He just kept looking until he found John the Baptist. I thought that my brother was just going down there to listen to the prophet John and perhaps to be baptized, but my brother stayed there in Judea. He believed that John the Baptist was a prophet sent from God and my brother John wanted to learn from him. And so he became a disciple of John the Baptist.

One day, Jesus of Nazareth came to the river Jordan to be baptized. My brother John told me the story. When Jesus asked John the Baptist to baptize Him, John the Baptist replied, “I need to be baptized by You, and You are coming to me?”

John the Baptist recognized that this was the Sinless One. The Messiah. But Jesus said to John the Baptist, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” And so John the Baptist baptized Jesus. And something amazing happened when Jesus came up out of the water! My brother John told me the story! The Spirit of God descended from heaven in the form of a dove, and rested upon Jesus. And then there was a voice heard from heaven saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

I wish that I had been there to witness that scene; to hear that voice from heaven. As I said earlier, my younger brother John was there. And he heard his teacher, John the Baptist,

testify, “I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.” The following day, Jesus came again to the Jordan river again. When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he cried out, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!” That was the day that my brother began to follow Jesus and he’s been following Jesus ever since!

But let me tell you about the day that I left everything to follow Jesus. We had been fishing one night on the Sea of Galilee. Myself, John, our father Zebedee, and also our partners, Simon and Andrew. They were in another boat. We worked together. The wise man Solomon declared that two are better than one, and that’s true in fishing too. Two boats are better than one! If one of us found a good place to fish, we would beckon to the other boat, so we both could get a good catch! We even developed a system of arm signals!

Well, we had been working all night, and it had been “one of those nights!” You know what I’m talking about, I’m sure. (Use arm signals) The kind of night that you don’t want to remember. We had worked hard all night and caught nothing. My father Zebedee was with us that night. And half joking I told my father that he was right. Fish do tremble at the sound of his name! The fish were so afraid of him that they all swam away to another part of the lake! As the first rays of the morning sun began to appear over the eastern mountains, we pulled up our boats on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee and began to clean our nets. No fish. Only weeds.

That’s when Jesus came over and asked Simon and Andrew if He could borrow their boat. Jesus had been healing and teaching in the region and the multitudes were following Him everywhere He went. Young and old, peasants and shepherds, religious leaders and tax collectors. That morning, the crowd was so large that Jesus was feeling swamped. So Simon and Andrew helped Jesus to get into their boat and pushed off from the shore. Not far. Jesus

wasn't trying to get away. He still wanted to speak to the people on the shore. He was close enough that I could clearly hear Him and even see the expressions on His face as He taught the people. I listened as I cleaned my nets.

After teaching for some time, Jesus turned to my friend Simon in the boat and said, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." My first reaction was to laugh! We had worked all night and caught nothing. And now it was morning. You don't catch fish during the day, not with a net! Why, even my father Zebedee couldn't do that. Catching fish with a net during the day would take a miracle! But Simon and his brother Andrew obeyed the command of Jesus. And we all watched from the shore.

When their boat was out in the deep water, Simon and Andrew cast their net over the side of the boat. I couldn't see the expressions on their faces from that distance, but I'm sure that they glanced toward the shore, wondering what we were all thinking! That's when I began to notice a panic in the boat. Then in the distance, I noticed the familiar arm signals. We had a plan in place when one of us needed some help. I recognized those arm signals. Simon and Andrew needed help! I turned to my brother John. But before I could say a word, John was already pushing our boat out into the water! I ran alongside him, jumped into the boat, and soon we were rowing out to help our partners.

What we saw as we approached their boat shocked us! Simon and Andrew's net was so full of fish that it was about to break. They didn't even dare to try to pull the catch of fish into the boat. So we came alongside to help them—our boat here, and their boat over there, with the net full of fish in between us! We worked frantically, grabbing flopping fish and slinging them into our boats. By the time we had brought all of the fish on board, both of our boats were about

to sink.

About that time, Simon fell down in front of Jesus, who was also knee-deep in fish, and Simon said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” But Jesus calmly responded to Simon’s frantic cry and said, “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.” Even though I was in the other boat, I felt like I was on holy ground. I wanted to take off my sandals, but I was also knee deep in fish!

When we finally got back to the shore, the crowd welcomed us with shouts and hallelujahs! They knew that we had experienced a miracle of God! That’s the day that I decided that I too would leave everything, and follow Jesus. Oh, we didn’t throw away the fish. We needed that catch to care for our families. Remember that our father Zebedee was there with us. Now he had the most amazing fish story to tell his friends! We left the catch, and the boats in his care! He looked elated and confused all at once. The greatest catch of his life and both of his sons leaving the family business on the same day. But we knew deep in our hearts that the LORD our God was leading us. And we sensed that our father knew that too. So we left our business as fisherman and followed Jesus.

I wish that I had time to share with you all the wonderful things that have happened since that day. I have seen a leper healed. That’s right. A leper, made whole! A paralyzed man able to walk again! People possessed by demons have been set free. One Sabbath when we were at the synagogue, Jesus healed a man whose right hand was withered. “Stretch out your hand!” Jesus said, and the man’s hand was completely restored, right before my eyes. The religious leaders were angry. But I knew that Jesus was the Son of God.

So when Jesus called us up onto the mountainside, overlooking the sea of Galilee, I

sensed that something special was about to happen. I was expecting Jesus to make a special announcement about setting up His kingdom. After all, people were talking about Jesus throughout Galilee. He had been walking around the region announcing “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” People were even coming down from Syria in the north, and the region of Decapolis on the east side of the Jordan, and Judea in the south. Everyone wanted to be with Jesus, to be healed of their diseases, and to listen to His words of life. I thought of the words of the prophet Isaiah: “The people who dwell in darkness have seen a great light!” “Arise and shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon you!”

Jesus had just spent the whole night in prayer. Early in the morning, He invited us to draw near. He seemed to be filled with a heavenly peace. Jesus laid His hands on each one of us, and blessed us. There were twelve of us altogether: Simon, Andrew, myself and my younger brother John, Philip and Bartholomew..he is also called Nathanael, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus..we call him that so the two of us don’t get mixed up!, Simon...he used to be a Zealot, Thaddaeus and Judas Iscariot. I think that’s all of us. Twelve in all. Jesus laid His hands on us and blessed us. He called us to be with Him. To walk with Him. He told us that He wanted us to join Him in His work. He wanted to send us out to share the good news that we had learned.

When we came down the hillside to the shore of the lake, a great multitude had gathered. They all wanted to touch Jesus. To be healed. Set free. And Jesus had compassion on them. Jesus healed them all. All who came, reaching out in simple faith, were healed!

But again, it was so crowded that Jesus made his way back up the hillside, overlooking the lake, and found a level place where the multitude could be seated and listen to His words.

Jesus taught most of the day. I tried to absorb everything that He was saying, but I think that it will take a lifetime of study and reflection to fully grasp all of His messages that day. I even got a little sleepy sitting in the afternoon sun, but my brother John gave me a complete report of everything that I missed! John has always had a great memory!

Jesus started out with these words: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven! Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Then Jesus turned to us and said, “Blessed are you, when they revile you and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.” What are you talking about, Jesus? “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

I didn't know quite what to make of it all. I'm just a fisherman. At least, I used to be. I didn't have any great plans to be persecuted for anything! I just planned to catch fish, clean nets, and live peacefully on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

But I have decided to walk with Jesus. And no matter what the future holds, I'm not turning back. I'm not really sure why Jesus called ME. I'm not perfect, you know. Ask my brother John. But he's not perfect either. We been having temper tantrums since we were little boys. It was mainly his fault! He always started it! Actually, we both need help when it comes

to our attitudes.

I'm so thankful that I don't have to be perfect to respond to the call of Jesus. Jesus called me to follow Him just as I am. He called me to walk with Him. And I just sense such healing when I am in the presence of Jesus. I'm still not sure what lies ahead. But this much is sure: I want to walk with Jesus.

And as we walk with Jesus, the words that Jesus shared on the mountainside that day will guide us on our journey. I'm going to continue to reflect on those words of Jesus. I sense that Jesus wants me to memorize them, to hide them in my heart. I hope that you will study those words of Jesus too, those words that He spoke on the mountainside, overlooking the Sea of Galilee. And that walk with Jesus will lead us to His Kingdom, a Kingdom which will last for ever and ever!

WALKING WITH JESUS - PART 2

Cascade of Blessings

Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: Matthew 5:3-12
Subject: Who are blessed
Complement: those who are part of the kingdom of heaven.
Exegetical idea: Those who are part of the kingdom of heaven are blessed.
Homiletical idea: **When you are part of the kingdom of heaven, you are blessed!**
Purpose: To help my hearers to understand that the Beatitudes are not a list of obligations in order to earn salvation or a list of required characteristics for those who want to walk with Jesus, but rather a reminder that those who are part of the kingdom of heaven are blessed.

Introduction

The Sermon on the Mount is considered by many to be one of the greatest teaching discourses of all time. The most complete account is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, chapters five, six and seven. You have a copy of that record in your hand this morning, and I hope that you will bring it with you for this entire series of messages, which we have entitled “Walking with Jesus.”

In the first message from this series, we listened to the testimony of James, the son of Zebedee. His testimony helped us to understand some of the historical background for the giving of this great sermon by Jesus. In the inspiring commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, we read these encouraging words:

Let us in imagination go back to that scene, and, as we sit with the disciples on the mountainside, enter into the thoughts and feelings that filled their hearts. Understanding what the words of Jesus meant to those who heard them, we may discern in them a new vividness and beauty, and may also gather for ourselves their deeper lessons.

If you missed the first message in our series on Walking with Jesus, you can watch it online at

www.forestlakechurch.org. You might also want to get your own copy of this inspiring book, Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing! It would be a wonderful companion book to read as part of our series on the Sermon on the Mount.

Bible scholars have had lively discussions over whether this Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew 5-7 was actually presented by Jesus on a single occasion, or whether it was collated from a variety of presentations by Jesus. One thing is certain. Even Matthew, in his 107 verses, does not record every word of Jesus. There is a parallel account by Luke, found in Luke chapter 6, which records 30 additional verses. Some of Luke's verses are very similar to Matthew and others add new information. So even Matthew's 107 verses is not a complete record of every word that Jesus spoke that day on the hillside. But whether this great Sermon on the Mount was spoken by Jesus on a single occasion, or whether it represents a collation of a variety of presentations by Jesus, what is important is this: the Holy Spirit directed the apostle Matthew to record these sayings of Jesus for the blessing of His followers. We believe that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof for correction, for instruction in righteousness. 2 Tim 3:16

The record of this great sermon on the mount by Jesus, as preserved for us by the apostle Matthew, begins with a collection of sayings which have been referred to by many Christians as the Beatitudes. We'll discover the meaning of that word later in our study because this first portion of the Sermon on the Mount will be the focus of our study today. Because this brief portion of Scripture is such a foundational part of the teaching of Jesus, I want to invite us all to read it together. The copy that you have in your hand is from the NKJV. Let's begin reading from Matthew 5:1, and we will read through verse 12.

“.....”

Many followers of Jesus have committed these words of Jesus to memory. And I would encourage you to do the same. How many of you here today have already memorized the Beatitudes? By hiding these words of Jesus in our hearts, we will be able to meditate upon them, day and night. We will be able to see new vividness and beauty and gather for ourselves their deeper lessons. Obviously, these words of Jesus are important. He even presents them in a way that makes it easy for us to memorize them.

Having affirmed the importance of these words of Jesus, we must admit that there is a great deal of confusion, both spoken and unspoken, about why Jesus spoke these words at the beginning of His great Sermon on the Mount. What are these Beatitudes all about?

First, let me assert that these sayings of Jesus are NOT a list of obligations in order to earn salvation. You could easily come to the conclusion that these sayings of Jesus at the beginning of His great Sermon on the Mount are a list of obligations in order to earn salvation. You have to be poor in spirit, you have to mourn, you have to be meek...in order to earn your place in the kingdom of heaven.

But that is NOT what Jesus is saying! How do we know that? The startling announcement of Jesus in Matthew 4:17 was this: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” What does repentance mean? Repentance means a turning around. A change of mind. We repent of our sin. We repent of trying to save ourselves. We repent of pushing God away from our lives. We say “Yes” to God’s mercy and grace. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand! That’s the way of salvation!

Before this sermon on the Mount was ever preached, a Jewish leader named Nicodemus

came to speak with Jesus because he believed that Jesus was a teacher sent from God.

Nicodemus came at night, perhaps because he was afraid of what people might think, or perhaps because he wanted to find Jesus alone. Jesus told Nicodemus the way of salvation. It was not by following a list of rules. How could Nicodemus be a part of Jesus' kingdom which would last forever and ever? Some of you have memorized those words of Jesus, recorded by the apostle John in John 3:16. What did Jesus say to Nicodemus? "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." It is "by grace you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Eph 2:8-9

So let us begin by asserting that these sayings of Jesus at the beginning of His great Sermon on the Mount are not a list of obligations in order to earn salvation. Jesus is NOT saying, "You have to be poor in spirit, you have to mourn, you have to be meek, you have to hunger and thirst after righteousness, you have to be merciful..., and so on, in order to earn salvation."

Secondly, let me assert that Jesus does not give these sayings at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount as a list of required characteristics for all who would walk with Him and be a part of His kingdom. But you might say, "Wait a minute, Pastor. Shouldn't those who walk with Jesus be poor in spirit? Should they recognize their spiritual need?" The answer to that question is "Yes!" It's crucially important for those who walk with Jesus to recognize their spiritual need? Unless we recognize our spiritual need, we will not be open to His grace. Jesus says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." Matthew 7: 7 And all of that happens because we recognize our need.

I also believe that those who walk with Jesus, those who choose to be a part of His kingdom, will mourn about their spiritual condition. And that's not a one time occurrence. Are we not, as followers of Jesus, constantly aware of the fact that we are not all that we should be? We cry out, like the apostle Paul, "O wretched person that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" And the same answer comes to us, by the Spirit of God, that came to the apostle Paul: "Thanks be to God! Through Jesus Christ, our Lord!"

But let me assert again that these sayings of Jesus at the beginning of His great Sermon on the Mount are not a list of required characteristics of all who would follow Jesus. That's not the reason Jesus gave them. When Jesus said to His first disciples, "Follow Me," did He say, "Follow Me if you're poor in heart, if you mourn, if you're meek, if you hunger and thirst after righteousness...?" Is that what Jesus said? No! Jesus simply said, "Follow Me!" Jesus invites us to follow Him just as we are! Now, I'm thankful that Jesus doesn't leave us where we are! I'm thankful that Jesus changes us. I'm thankful that we are born again by His Spirit. I'm thankful that if anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation! But I'm especially thankful that we can respond to the call of Jesus just as we are. As the old Gospel song puts it, "Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me, and that Thou bidst me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come!"

So these Beatitudes, this collection of sayings at the beginning of Jesus' great Sermon on the Mount are NOT a list of obligations in order to earn salvation, and they are NOT a list of required characteristics in order to follow Jesus. Then, what are they? Why did He begin His great Sermon on the Mount with these memorable sayings? A clue is found in the first word of each of the eight sayings recorded in Matthew 5:3-10, and repeated in the first word of Matthew 5:11.

Blessed. Blessed. Blessed. Blessed. Blessed. Do I need to repeat the word another 4 times, or did you get the message? A clue to understanding the purpose of Jesus in beginning His great Sermon on the Mount with this collection of sayings is found in the word “Blessed.”

The word translated “blessed” in Matthew’s account of the Sermon on the Mount is the Greek word MAKARIOS. This word is used more than 40 times in the New Testament, from these words of Jesus recorded in the book of Matthew all the way to the book of Revelation, where we are told, “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!”

On several occasions, the KJV translates the word MAKARIOS as “happy.” And Young’s concordance would agree with that meaning for the word MAKARIOS. Happy. Remember that these sayings at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount are called the Beatitudes? That word comes from the Latin *beatitudo*, which means happiness.

But the word MAKARIOS is more than a feeling of elation, an emotional exuberance. This word MAKARIOS has the connotation of a deep inner joy. A radical joy. A joy that wells up within you when you experience the blessing of heaven.

And why do we experience this blessing of radical joy? The answer is found in the first and the last of the sayings of Jesus at the beginning of His great Sermon on the Mount. Matt 5:3 Blessed....for theirs IS the kingdom of heaven. And again in Matthew 5:10. Blessed....for theirs IS the kingdom of heaven. Those who are part of Jesus’ kingdom of heaven are blessed, filled with radical, overflowing joy!

But you might say, “I still don’t understand Matt 5:10. How are you blessed when you are persecuted?” I think that the apostle Peter helps us to understand this verse. In 1 Pet 3:14, we read, “But even if you suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed.” The persecution is

not the reason that you are blessed. You are blessed even though you are suffering persecution. You are blessed because you are part of the kingdom of heaven! You experience the blessing of radical joy. It's a deep inner joy that transcends outward circumstances. Even if you are reviled and persecuted, you are blessed because you are part of the kingdom of heaven.

This kingdom that Jesus speaks about is a present kingdom. The kingdom of heaven is at hand, Jesus declared. The kingdom of heaven is in your midst! And we become a part of that kingdom by repenting of our sins and receiving Jesus as our Messiah, our Savior and Lord. But this kingdom is also a kingdom which is to come. A kingdom of glory. A kingdom where God will make all things new. A kingdom where God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. And there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, and there shall be no more pain!

Here this message, loud and clear, at the beginning of Jesus' great Sermon on the Mount. Blessed. Blessed. Blessed. Blessed. This great sermon opens with a cascade of blessings. And Jesus tell us "When you are part of the kingdom of heaven, you are blessed!"

In the past few months, I have been reminded again that when you are part of the kingdom of heaven, you are blessed. Some months ago, a member of our church family, Larry Christensen, was diagnosed with stage 5 melanoma. Now, I'm not an expert on cancers of any kind. But I understand the classifications of stage 1, stage 2, stage 3, stage 4 and stage 5. To be diagnosed with stage 5 melanoma is very serious.

When Larry learned about his diagnosis, he wanted to do everything that he could to live. He loved his family, he loved his church and he loved life. So Larry decided to have the melanoma removed from his thigh. Unfortunately, the melanoma had already spread, and it would rapidly spread to the rest of his body.

Larry was fighting for his life. He started chemotherapy just a few weeks ago and came home a week ago yesterday to recuperate from his first round of treatments. We were all praying for Larry, and our prayers were answered. You say, “Oh, is Larry doing better now?” No. Larry stopped breathing early Sunday morning, and is waiting the call of the Lifegiver when Jesus returns in glory.

Then, how were our prayers answered? We were praying that God would bless Larry and that God would fill Larry with peace as he rested in the arms of Jesus. A few weeks ago, when I was visiting with Larry at his home, we talked about Jesus and the kingdom of heaven. Larry wasn't preoccupied with buying more life insurance or getting a supplemental health insurance plan. He was resting in the arms of Jesus. Larry knew that Jesus loved him. And Larry was resting in the arms of Jesus. In my last prayer with Larry, just a few days before he died, we rejoiced together in the blessed assurance that only Jesus can give.

Larry was a living example to me that when you are part of the kingdom of heaven, you are blessed! Larry sleeps now, in a sure and certain hope of a resurrection when our Lord Jesus returns in glory. For him, time stands still. He made his choice. He chose to rest in the arms of Jesus. He chose to be a part of the kingdom of heaven. He experienced deep in his soul that when you are part of the kingdom of heaven, you are blessed.

Most of us are not battling with stage 5 melanoma. But each one of us can experience the truth that when you are part of the kingdom of heaven you are blessed! My wife and I experienced some unexpected financial blessings last December. A year-end bonus. An honorarium for speaking at a leadership conference. Then we were blessed again to be able to add those funds to our Christmas upside-down offering. Then we were blessed again to be part

of a church family that is experiencing miracles of God at every turn! We too are experiencing a cascade of blessings. When you are part of the kingdom of heaven, you are blessed!

And I don't know about you, but I feel so blessed that I just want to give blessings back to the Lord in return. I want to say with the Psalmist, "I will bless the LORD at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the LORD. The humble shall hear of it and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together!"

WALKING WITH JESUS - PART 3

Salt and Light

Dr. Derek Morris

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| Preaching passage: | Matthew 5:13-16 |
| Subject: | Who are we as followers of Jesus and citizens of His kingdom |
| Complement: | salt and light to the world |
| Exegetical idea: | As followers of Jesus and citizens of His kingdom, we are salt and light to the world. |
| Homiletical idea: | Jesus wants to use you to make a difference in the world! |
| Purpose: | To remind my hearers that as followers of Jesus and citizens of His kingdom, we are salt and light to the world. |

Introduction

“This is going to be an easy sermon to write!” I’m sure that some preachers have had that reaction as they came to the passage of Scripture that we are going to study today in the great Sermon on the Mount. Jesus uses two simple metaphors for His followers, those who are part of His kingdom: You are the salt of the earth, and you are the light of the world. Some of you have heard so many sermons based on Matthew 5:13-16 that you could preach the sermon yourself!

The sermon goes something like this: Salt seasons..we should season our community and make it a better place. Salt preserves food and prevents it from spoiling...we should preserve our world and prevent it from going rotten. And if you live in the frozen northlands, salt melts ice..we should be warm and friendly! And don’t forget that light dispels the darkness..so we should also dispel the darkness of error and evil. What an easy sermon to write! But there’s one big problem. We’ve heard it all before!

As I began my study of this next portion of Jesus’ great Sermon on the Mount this week, I remembered the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 13:52: “Every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his

storeroom new treasures as well as old”? Matthew 13:52 NIV

So let’s take a fresh look at this portion of the great Sermon on the Mount. Let’s discover some new treasures as well as old! Studying this passage has changed my life this week, and I believe that we will learn some important lessons about walking with Jesus!

Jesus began His great sermon with a collection of sayings which many Christians have referred to as the Beatitudes. We studied those sayings of Jesus last week, and we concluded that the Beatitudes are not a list of obligations in order to earn salvation, they are not a list of required characteristics in order to become a follower of Jesus...rather this list of sayings at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount is a cascade of blessings to remind us that when you are part of the kingdom of heaven, you are blessed! If you missed last week’s message you can watch it online at www.forestlakechurch.org.

Now let us read the words of Jesus that follow the Beatitudes. Take your copy of the Sermon on the Mount and let’s read together from Matthew 5:13. “.....”

When we first hear the words “you are the salt of the earth,” many of us immediately want to talk about what salt does. After all, one use for salt is alluded to in the second part of Matthew 5:13. Salt adds flavor! But before we jump to what salt does, I want us to focus on the value of salt, at least in the time of the people who were listening to these words of Jesus.

Salt was a precious commodity. Did you hear what I just said? Salt was a precious commodity. That’s hard for us to grasp, at least here in the United States of America. Yesterday, I went to the grocery store and bought a 11lb 10 oz box of salt for 51 cents. That’s cheap! About 32 cents per pound! And because salt is so inexpensive, at least here in the United States in the 21st century, we can easily miss the first important lesson that I believe Jesus wants

us to learn from this portion of His great Sermon on the Mount.

Salt is a precious commodity in the Roman Empire. Slaves were traded for salt. According to the Roman naturalist and historian Pliny the Elder, Roman soldiers were often paid with salt.. That's where the expression "being worth one's salt" comes from. The Latin word for salt, sal, is the basis for the English word salary! In the time of Jesus, in that cultural context, salt was precious! Someone has estimated that in the time of Jesus, this container of salt would be worth more than a day's salary, not 51 cents! Salt was a precious commodity!

(<http://www.tomorrowlands.org/misc/salt.html>)

So before we hurry past the first sentence in Matthew 5:13 and try to focus on what salt does, let this truth sink in. When Jesus says, You are the salt of the earth!, don't think 51 cents. Jesus is saying, "You are precious!" You are valuable. You are precious to me, and you are also precious to the world. Isn't that a beautiful insight? I admit that I never noticed that before in my hurried reading of the sermon on the mount. But I believe that it is true: You are precious, both to Jesus and to the world.

How do I know that? Listen to these words of the LORD, recorded by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 43:4. "Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honored and I have loved you." That was spoken by the LORD our God to His people in the 8th century BC. Are those words of the LORD still true today? Absolutely! The LORD God says to you today, "You are precious in My sight, and I love you!" Someone ought to say "Amen" out there! That's such good news! We can't just sit here like limp lettuce leaves! You are precious to the LORD and He loves you!

And Jesus, in this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, reminds us that we are precious,

we are valuable, not only to Him but also to the world. Don't miss that important lesson at the beginning of this familiar passage of Scripture.

Salt is not only precious, valuable, but salt is also useful! I came across a Roman proverb which may well have been common during the time of the earthly ministry of Jesus. Perhaps Jesus and His followers heard the Roman soldiers say, "Nil sole et sale utilius."

I hope that I pronounced that correctly! I missed out on Latin in high school! Did anyone here study Latin? Then you could translate this proverb for us! Nil sole et sale utilius. There is nothing more useful than the sun and salt. There is nothing more useful than the sun and salt.

When I first discovered this Roman proverb, I was startled. Because the two metaphors for His followers that Jesus uses in the section of the sermon on the mount are salt and light. There is nothing more useful than the sun (or we might say "light") and salt.

Salt isn't just precious, like an emerald or a pearl...something to look at and admire. Salt is also useful. So what are some of the uses for salt, and how does this metaphor of salt help us to understand what it means to walk with Jesus? Well, certainly, the most obvious uses for salt is alluded to in Matthew 5:13. Let's read the text together one more time. "....." Salt adds flavor. Some critics of Scripture are quick to point out an apparent error in the teaching of Jesus in the sentence that we just read. They say, "Salt, sodium chloride, never loses its flavor! That's a mistake!" And a person would be correct in asserting the pure sodium chloride never loses its flavor. But some of the salt that was available in Palestine was dug from the salt flats surrounding the Salt Sea, otherwise known as the Dead Sea. There were many other impurities mixed with the salt. This wasn't pure sodium chloride. And if this mixture was exposed to the

elements, rain would cause the salt to leach out, leaving only a pile of impurities that might look like salt, but actually the salt was nowhere to be found. That pile of impurities was worthless, at least for those who were looking for salt. It might as well be spread on the pathway and trampled under foot by passing travelers.

Certainly, it's true that Jesus wants His followers to be a seasoning influence in the world. It ought to make a difference on your street, on your cul-de-sac, in your apartment complex, that a follower of Jesus is living there. It ought to make a difference at your workplace that a follower of Jesus is there. Am I speaking the truth today? We're not talking here about working your way to heaven. We're talking about recognizing that you are precious and that Jesus wants to use you to make a difference in the world.

We are also very familiar with another use for salt: salt preserves. In a time when there was no refrigeration, salt was essential for the preservation of food. Salt preserves. The application is clear. The presence of followers of Jesus in the world is a preserving influence. I find the story of Sodom and Gomorrah to be a sad one. The real problem with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah was not that there were wicked people there. There are wicked people everywhere! The real problem with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah was the fact that the people of God were nowhere to be found. There was no preserving influence. Evil went unchecked...from bad to worse, until finally those cities were destroyed.

"You are the salt of the earth," Jesus says. Your presence in your community, at your workplace, in your circle of influence..hinders corruption and rotteness.

But I want to go beyond the idea of preservation today and emphasize that salt is essential for life! Salt not only adds flavor and preserves. Salt is essential for life! Now I must

admit that chemistry was not my best subject in high school. But I know that pure salt is sodium chloride. Isn't that correct? And without an adequate amount of sodium, your body can go into shock. Some of you already know where I'm going with this. My nurse practitioner wife tells me that there is a medical condition called hyponatremia. A medical dictionary defines hyponatremia as an abnormally low concentration of sodium in the blood. A common cause of hyponatremia is excessive sweating. This doesn't happen often, but it can happen if someone is running a marathon, or involved in extremely demanding physical activity. The more you sweat, the more sodium you lose. I'm told that you can sweat up to 3 quarts during each hour of strenuous exercise. And you need to replace that fluid. Not just water. You also need sodium and chloride, or your electrolytes will become depleted and you will be in danger of suffering from hyponatremia.

Let me share with you some of the symptoms of hyponatremia: fatigue, lightheadedness, weakness, cramping, nausea, dizziness, confusion, disorientation, seizures, coma, and, in the most severe cases, death. Now follow where I'm going with this. Jesus says to you and to me, "You are the salt of the earth. You are not only precious, but you are useful." The Romans were right: there is nothing more useful than salt! Salt not only adds flavor. Salt preserves. And salt is essential for life.

Your community needs you. Your workplace needs you. Your loved ones and friends who don't know Jesus need you. I don't say that to be arrogant. I say it because it's true. Salt is essential for life! Listen to what happens to a culture when the people of God are nowhere to be found: fatigue, lightheadedness, weakness, cramping, nausea, dizziness, confusion, disorientation, seizures, coma, and death.

As a follower of Jesus, as one who walks with Jesus, I need to recognize that I am not only precious, but I am useful. Jesus wants to use me to make a difference in the world. Jesus wants to use you to make a difference in the world! And that thought is further developed in Matthew 5:14-16. Let's read that portion of the sermon on the mount together:

“.....” We might paraphrase the Roman proverb and say, “There is nothing more useful than light and salt!” As a follower of Jesus, you are not only salt of the earth; you are the light of the world! Your presence, your witness, your testimony dispels the darkness!

But you say, “Wait a minute! I'm not the light of the world! Jesus declared that He is the Light of the world! You're correct in asserting that Jesus declared “I am the Light of the world!” But let's examine His words carefully, recorded in John 8:12. “I am the Light of the World,” Jesus says. “He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life.” Jesus is the Light of the world, but those of us who follow Jesus will not only not walk in darkness. What does the text say? We will have the light of life!

Jesus wants His light to shine through you! Jesus wants to bless the world through you. Jesus wants to dispel the darkness through you. Jesus wants to use you to make a difference in the world. Jesus is saying, “Don't hide the light that is within you under a basket!” Don't hinder what I want to do through you!” Notice, Jesus doesn't say, “Make your light shine!” What does Jesus say? “Let your light..shine!”

When you walk with Jesus, when you are part of His kingdom, His light is within you. He wants to shine out through you. Don't get in the way of what Jesus wants to do through you. And when people see that Jesus is doing through you, they will recognize that it's not you. What God is doing in you and through you is too amazing to be all your doing! Rather, people will see

what God is doing through you and they will glorify our Father in heaven!

And that is not just the experience of an individual, but the experience of a community of believers. In both Matthew 5:13 and Matthew 5:14, the “you” plural is used in the Greek text. Not just “you are the salt of the earth” and “you are the light of the world” (point at one person) but “you are the salt of the earth” and “you are the light of the world!” (point at everyone). Our life together as the people of God is to be salt and light to those around us. God wants to use us to make a difference in the world!

This past Sunday I received an e-mail from a follower of Jesus who is living out the truth of this passage in the sermon on the Mount. Her name is Gayle, and Gayle is letting Jesus use her to make a difference in the world. She is preserving life and dispelling the darkness!

Gayle was traveling home from Australia to Baltimore, Maryland. That’s a long trip! And just this past Sunday, she was on her last flight, from Dallas, Texas, to Baltimore, Maryland. The passengers had no indication that there was a problem with their plane until they had almost touched down on the runway in Baltimore, Maryland. Just before the plane was about to land, the pilot opened full throttle and the plane began to climb into the air again!

Has that ever happened to anyone here? It happened to me some years ago when our plane was about to land in Atlanta, Georgia. We found out later that a small plane in front of us had failed to clear the runway and at the last moment our pilot aborted the landing. Woah! I can still remember the strange feeling in my stomach. We were supposed to be going this way (open hand moving downward) not this way! (open hand moving upward and banking steeply).

For our flight, we simply circled around and came back in to land. But Gayle’s situation was more complicated. The pilot announced that their plane was having problems with the

landing gear. Gayle looked around and she could see the anxiety on the faces of the passengers. The flight was almost completely full, apart from an empty seat between her and a lady sitting two seats over from her.

Gayle started praying. She thought about the possibility of her death. But instead of being filled with fear, the peace of Jesus filled her heart. She had been listening to some of my wife's Scripture songs on her Ipod, and the words of one particular song came to Gayle's mind:

Listen:

Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.
In God (I will praise His word),
In God I have put my trust;
Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.
I will not fear
What can flesh do to me?

Through those words of Scripture, the Lord brought peace to Gayle's heart! Hallelujah!

About that time, the pilot tried a second landing, but pulled out of the approach even earlier than before. That's when Gayle noticed the lady sitting two seats over. Gayle found out later that the lady's name was Darlene. Darlene was wiping the tears from her face and shaking uncontrollably. Gayle thought of the Scripture songs and the peace that was in her heart. So she scooted over into the empty seat next to Darlene and asked Darlene if she would like to listen to the Scripture songs on her Ipod.

Darlene took hold of Gayle's hand and held on tight. But Gayle noticed that as Darlene listened to the Scripture song, her grip became less tense. As the plane made its third approach for landing, fire trucks and emergency ground crew were lined up on either side of the runway. During the final approach, Gayle new friend Darlene remained calm, listening to the Scripture

songs!

When the plane finally landed, many of the passengers began to applaud. All but Gayle and Darlene. Their heads were bowed in prayer. Perhaps you're wondering how I found out about this amazing story. It only happened last Sunday. Well, here's the rest of the story. Gayle went to my wife's Trilogy Scripture Songs website. She left her testimony there and ordered a copy of the Trilogy Scripture Songs CD that was on her Ipod with the following instructions: Please send this CD to Darlene with a short note: "From your friend on the airplane!"

That, my friends, is being salt and light! That is preserving life. That is allowing Jesus to shine through you. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. That will be manifested in different ways at different times. But this is true for all of us who follow Jesus: Jesus wants to use you to make a difference in the world!

WALKING WITH JESUS - PART 4
Beautiful reflections
Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: Matthew 5:17-48
Subject: What are the good works that bring glory to our Father in heaven
Complement: those works that reflect the beauty of His character of love and mercy.
Exegetical idea: The good works that bring glory to our Father in heaven are those works that reflect the beauty of His character of love and mercy.
Homiletical idea: **Jesus wants you to reflect the beautiful character of our Father in heaven to the world!**
Purpose: To remind my hearers that God's ideal for them is higher than the highest human thought can reach—to reflect the beauty of God's character to those around them! This will result in glory being given not to us but to our Father in heaven.

I love beautiful reflections, don't you? Look at this one! (slide #1) Beautiful! I love to get away from everything man-made and surround myself with the beauty of God's creation. Beautiful reflections come at different times (slide #2), and in different places. (slide #3) Sometimes it's hard to tell what is the real thing and what is the beautiful reflection! (slide #4) Beautiful reflections can be found in the most unexpected places. (slide #5) We all enjoy looking at beautiful reflections! (slide #6)

My wife Bodil loves beautiful reflections! When we were dating, she took a picture of me standing beside a reflection pond. And she was so enamored with the beautiful reflection that she actually cut my head off in the picture! No, I'm making up a story! Do you want to see the picture? She found it for me on Thursday! (slide #7) Look! No head! Maybe she thought that the picture looked better without my head! But she loved the beautiful reflection!

We all love beautiful reflections! And I'm convinced from my study of the sermon on the mount this week that Jesus loves beautiful reflections too!

This is part 4 of our series on the great sermon of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount. We are calling this series Walking with Jesus. We began with the testimony of James, son of Zebedee, and set the scene for the preaching of this great sermon by Jesus. Then we looked at the cluster of sayings at the beginning of the sermon. Many Christians have referred to that cluster of sayings as...the Beatitudes. We discovered that the Beatitudes are not a list of obligations in order to earn salvation and become a part of the kingdom of heaven. They are not a list of required characteristics in order to become a follower of Jesus. Rather, this cascade of blessings at the beginning of the sermon on the mount are there to remind us that when we are part of the kingdom of heaven, we are blessed. Blessed. Blessed. Blessed. This great sermon of Jesus begins with a cascade of blessings!

Then last time we considered the powerful metaphors of salt and light. Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth” and “You are the light of the world”. We discovered from our study that Jesus wants to use you, Jesus wants to use me, to make a difference in the world! What an amazing thought! You are not here on the planet just to survive, or to make a living. Jesus wants to use you to make a difference in the world!

Jesus concludes His discussion of salt and light with the words recorded in Matthew 5:16. If you have a copy of the great sermon of Jesus, let’s read those words together. Matthew 5:16. “.....”

“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Remember those words: Father in heaven. Our teacher for our advanced class on the Sermon on the Mount, Dr. Ernie Bursey, tells me that this is first time that the words “Father in heaven” are used in Scripture. We’ll hear this expression numerous times in this great

sermon on the mount, including the great model prayer that we'll study, called "The Lord's Prayers." Jesus is inviting us to relate to our Great and Awesome God in a new and intimate way: our Father in heaven! And Jesus tells us that our good works will bring glory to our Father in heaven.

In the section of the sermon that follows, Jesus will provide several examples of those good works that bring glory to our Father in heaven. We are going to study those examples today. At the end of our study today, you'll still have many questions. We could preach a sermon on each example. But I want you to see the big picture. We'll study these examples in greater detail in our advanced class every Tuesday evening with Dr. Ernie Bursey! If you can't join us on campus on Tuesday evening, join us online at www.forestlakechurch.org.

The context for these examples of good works that bring glory to our Father in heaven is found in Matthew 5, beginning with verse 17. Some people were accusing Jesus of not caring about holy living. After all, He didn't abide by all of the man-made rules to protect the Sabbath. Jesus boldly declared, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" and "It is good to do good on the Sabbath day." And Jesus didn't require His disciples to fast, like other teachers, including John the Baptist. We'll study about that next week.

So some people accused Jesus of not caring about holy living. You can hear Jesus' response to this accusation in Matthew 5, beginning with verse 17. Let's read the words of Jesus together. Matthew 5, beginning with verse 17. "....."

Those words must have shocked the people who were listening! Our righteousness has to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? Now you have to remember that to the people who heard those words, the Pharisees were the holiest people that they knew. When we

hear the word Pharisee we think “hypocrite” or “self-righteous legalist.” But to the people of Jesus’ day, the Pharisees were the spiritual heroes. All they ever thought about was trying to be holy, and correcting everyone else who wasn’t measuring up.

So the words of Jesus were startling. Your righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees. Yes. Your holiness but go beyond the letter of the law, beyond the external, to the spirit of the law, the internal. Jesus cares a great about holy living. In fact, Jesus wants us to be a beautiful reflection of the character of our Father in heaven.

So Jesus gives us six examples of good works that will reflect the beautiful character of our Father in heaven and bring glory to His name. None of these good works is a means of earning salvation. None of these works gains us entrance into the kingdom of heaven. But to those who have received the kingdom of heaven as a gift of grace, poor in spirit, with nothing to recommend us except our need and our heavenly Father’s abundant mercy and grace and love, to those who are part of the kingdom Jesus gives six examples of good works that will bring glory to our Father in heaven.

The first example is found in Matthew 5:20-26. Let’s read the words of Jesus together. “.....” Jesus says, “Don’t just not murder. Don’t be angry . Seek reconciliation. Love. Be a beautiful reflection of the character of your Father in heaven.

Then Jesus gives another example of good works that bring glory to our Father in heaven. Matthew 5, beginning with verse 27. Let’s read together. “.....” Those are startling words. Please don’t take them literally and go and pluck out your eye or cut off your hand. I heard a story of someone who actually did that, or at least tried to. But losing one eye won’t stop you from looking lustfully at another people. Having one less hand won’t stop you

from touching inappropriately or stealing things that don't belong to you. Jesus is using a hyperbole here. An exaggeration. He is saying, "Don't let anything stop you from being the person that your heavenly Father is calling you to be!" Jesus wants you to be a beautiful reflection of the character of your Father in heaven.

Let's read on. There is a third example of good works that bring glory to our Father in heaven, starting in Matthew 5:31. "....." Those are challenging words. On another occasion, Jesus had this to say about divorce. Matthew 19:4-6,8: "....." I know. You have many questions. We will study this passage more deeply in our advanced class on Tuesday evening. But would you agree with me that God doesn't want us to discard relationships like pieces of used clothing? If you get tired of it, you just throw it away. That does not reflect the character of our Father in heaven. God is love. Faithful, unselfish, self-sacrificing love. And Jesus calls us, in our relationships as husbands and wives, to be a beautiful reflection of the character of our Father in heaven.

Jesus gives a fourth example of good works that bring glory to our Father in heaven, beginning with Matthew 5:33. Let's read those words of Jesus together. "....." Why do people use an oath? Is it to convince people that they are really being honest this time? People use expressions today like "cross my heart and hope to die if I'm not telling you the truth" or "I swear on my mother's grave" whatever that means. You may have even heard someone say, "May lightning strike me dead if I'm not telling you the truth!" and we all run for cover, don't we?!

Why not be honest all the time? If a person is a liar, is putting a hand on a Bible and promising to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth going to turn that person into

an honest individual? Just let your yes be yes and your no be no. Speak the truth at all times.

Jesus was a perfect reflection of His Father, and He was full of grace and full of truth. And Jesus wants us to be a beautiful reflection of the character of our Father in heaven.

If you think that the first four examples have been challenging, listen to the last two examples that Jesus gives of good works that bring glory to our Father in heaven. The fifth example is found in Matthew 5, beginning with verse 38. Let's read the words of Jesus together: "....." Does that mean that we have to stop for every beggar, and lend things to people even if we know that they will never give them back? I have lots of questions about this fifth example of good works that bring glory to our Father in heaven. I'm going to ask Dr. Burse to explain this passage to us in our advanced class on Tuesday evening! But as I think about Jesus and His life on this earth, I realize that He modeled the truth of this passage. The apostle Peter gives this testimony about Jesus, recorded in 1 Peter 2:21-24. "....." Jesus did not retaliate. He did not threaten. He could have called ten thousand angels. But Jesus gave all of Himself and His self-sacrificing love is a beautiful reflection of the character of our Father in heaven.

Then comes the sixth and final example that Jesus gives of good works that bring glory to our Father in heaven. Matthew 5, beginning with verse 43. Let's read the words of Jesus together: "....." Moses records the word of the LORD to love your neighbor. That's found in the book of Leviticus, chapter 19:18. But there is no mention there of hating your enemy. That was a man-made addition. Oh, I'm sure that there were people who said "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy," but only half of that was found in Scripture. People still do that today, don't they? Try to add things to the Scripture that aren't written there? Like,

“well, it says somewhere in the Bible that God helps those who help themselves.” That’s not in the Bible! Try Poor Richard’s Almanac, published in 1735 by Benjamin Franklin. I know, it’s not original with him either. But don’t try to add it to the Bible! That’s what people did when they took the word of the Lord “love your neighbor” and added “but hate your enemy”!

Jesus stops that idea dead in its tracks and boldly declares, “Love your enemies....”

Jesus wants you to be a beautiful reflection of the character of our Father in heaven!

Did you notice the expression “Father in heaven” again in Matthew 5:45? We find it again at the end of these six examples of good works that bring glory to our Father in heaven, Matthew 5:48. Jesus says, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” Some people get bogged down with the word “perfect”. They come up with all kinds of doctrines about being sinless in order to deserve heaven. And they miss the main point that Jesus is trying to make. We’ll study the true meaning of that word “perfect” in our advanced class on Tuesday evenings! But I want to point out that in Luke’s account of the sermon of the mount, Jesus doesn’t even conclude the section of the sermon with the word “perfect”. We read these words of Jesus, recorded in Luke 6:36. “Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.”

The message of this section of the great sermon on the mount isn’t about being perfect or not being perfect. The message of this section of the great sermon on the mount is this: Jesus wants you to be a beautiful reflection of the character of your Father in heaven. Be loving, be forgiving, be merciful. Be a beautiful reflection...not to earn salvation! No! But to bring glory to our Father in heaven. Jesus wants you to be a beautiful reflection of the character of our Father in heaven.

A member of our church family, Gayle Murphy, has captured that truth in the words of a song. I want you to listen to the words. And as you listen, you're going to see some beautiful reflections of the character of our Father in heaven. I share these beautiful reflections with you not to bring glory to any person, but to bring glory to our Father in heaven.

Look now, and listen, and may your heart respond with this simple prayer: May my life be a beautiful reflection of the character of our Father in heaven.

(Listen to song and watch Powerpoint presentation)

Prayer: Yes, Lord. That is our prayer. May our lives be an example of your love and grace...all our days. Father in heaven, may we be beautiful reflections of your character and bring glory to Your name. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

WALKING WITH JESUS - PART 5
The Center of Attention
Dr. Derek Morris

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Preaching passage: | Matthew 6:1-18 |
| Subject: | When followers of Jesus give to the poor, pray or fast, who should be the center of attention |
| Complement: | God, not us. |
| Exegetical idea: | When followers of Jesus give to the poor, pray, or fast, God should be the center of attention, not us. |
| Homiletical idea: | When your Father in heaven is the center of attention, you will be blessed with heavenly blessings. |
| Purpose: | To encourage my hearers to make God the center of attention in their lives and in the witness. |

Have you ever sat in a class where the teacher was just rambling on and on and on? You had no idea where the teacher was going and how the teacher was trying to get there? Jesus wasn't like that! Jesus was a Master Teacher. He wanted everyone to understand His teaching; at least, everyone whose heart was open to truth.

In the portion of the great sermon on the mount that we are going to study today, we will see another example of Jesus, the Master Teacher. In His opening statement at the beginning of Matthew chapter 6, Jesus gives a concise summary of the 17 verses that follow. In teaching, we call that deductive methodology. You state what you are going to talk about, and then you unpack that idea.

We are continuing our series on the great sermon of Jesus, the sermon on the Mount. We have entitled this series of messages, Walking with Jesus. Jesus began His great sermon with a collection of sayings to remind us that when you are part of the kingdom of heaven, you are blessed! Then, with the metaphors of salt and light, Jesus reminded us that He wants to use us to make a difference in the world! In the rest of Matthew chapter 5, Jesus gave us six

examples of the good works that will bring glory to our Father in heaven and challenged us to let our lives be a beautiful reflection of the character of our Father in heaven. If you missed any of those messages in this series on Walking with Jesus, you can watch them online at www.forestlakechurch.org.

And now Jesus, the Master Teacher, gives a summary statement of the next section of His great sermon on the mount. Please take your copy of His sermon and read with me from Matthew 6:1. “.....” There it is. Clear and simple. A summary statement of the 17 verses that follow. Let’s read it again. “.....”

We’ll discover as we continue our study that Jesus is not opposed to the “acts of righteousness” or “acts of devotion” that He now discusses. There is nothing inherently wrong with giving to the needy, prayer, and fasting. Jesus wants to talk to us today about how we do our acts of devotion. And as we study, remember the opening statement of the Master Teacher in Matthew 6:1.

Now let’s look at the first “act of devotion” that Jesus highlights in Matthew 6:2-4. Let’s read together. “.....” Jesus might have mentioned any act of service performed by a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. Giving to the needy is just one example. And what lesson can we learn from these words of Jesus? Jesus says, “Don’t make a big deal about your act of service.” Did people really blow trumpets to attract attention to themselves when they gave to the poor? (Make the sound of a trumpet, and look around to make sure that everyone is noticing before you give something to an imaginary beggar). Did they really do that? I don’t know. But we still have this expression today: “he’s blowing his own trumpet! She’s blowing her own trumpet!” In other words, those people are drawing attention to

themselves. They want to be noticed. They want to be the center of attention. I can also see them now! (Act out giving to the needy in a way that draws attention to themselves).

When people give to the needy, when people perform acts of service with a desire to draw attention to themselves, do they receive any reward? What did Jesus say? Let's read the words of Jesus at the end of Matthew 6:2. "....." What is their reward? The attention that they are seeking.

How then should we act when we give to the needy, or perform any act of service in Jesus' name? Let's read again from Matthew 6:3-4. "....." Verse 3 is a hyperbole. An exaggeration. Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing! (Act that out) There's nothing wrong with counseling together as a family about how God wants your family to get involved in an act of service. There's nothing wrong with a group of people working together to provide meals to disaster victims. That's not what Jesus is talking about here. What Jesus is saying is this: Don't try to draw attention to what you are doing.

A couple of weeks ago, Roger Anderson was filmed by some of the national television networks in connection with some disaster relief that members of our church were doing. Roger wasn't there looking for a television interview. He wasn't wandering around the disaster site saying, "Hello everyone! Notice me!" He was serving in Jesus name. And Jesus says, "Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Remember the opening words of Jesus, the Master Teacher. Matthew 6:1 "....." Do not give to draw attention to yourself. Do not do any act of service in Jesus' name to draw attention to yourself. Do it to bring glory to your Father in heaven. Let your Father in heaven be the center of attention!

Let's look at the second "act of devotion" mentioned by Jesus. Matthew 6, beginning with verse 5. Let's read together. "....." Can you believe that? These people deliberately prayed in places where people would notice them! Their goal was not to commune with God but to be noticed by people. Is there any reward when you pray like that? What is the reward? The attention that a person is seeking. Notice the words of Jesus at the end of Matthew 6:5. "....."

Let's read on. Matthew 6:6. "....." Is Jesus opposed to praying in public? What's the answer? No! How do we know that? Because Jesus prayed in public. Here are just a few examples. Write them down. John 11:41-42. John 17. Luke 23:34. There is nothing inherently wrong with praying in the presence of others. But Jesus is saying, "Don't pray to bring attention to yourself! Let's your prayers bring glory to your Father in heaven. Let your Father in heaven be the center of attention!"

My wife's grandmother was the daughter of a physician to the emperor of China. Her family lived near the Forbidden City in what is now called Beijing. The Feng family had become followers of Jesus and prayer was an important act of devotion in the Feng family. Even when she was older, living in the United States, Bodil's grandmother would pray in Chinese. According to grandpa, when grandma would pray in private, she would kowtow and blow kisses to Jesus. I find that a very beautiful expression of her love and devotion, based on her cultural heritage. But my wife never saw her grandma pray like that in public. You see, grandma didn't want to draw attention to herself. She wanted all of the attention to go to her Father in heaven. I'm so thankful for praying grandparents and praying parents, aren't you? Who knows where some of us would be if someone hadn't been praying for us? They were praying not to bring

attention to themselves. They were crying out to God. He was the center of their attention.

Let's read on. Matthew 6:7. "....." How does the King James Version of the Bible translate those words of Jesus? "Use not vain repetitions." The Greek verb used here, $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\lambda\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota\tau\epsilon$, is only used this one place in the entire New Testament. That's always significant. We have to ask ourselves, "Why is this particular word used?" What is the significance of this particular word? $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\lambda\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota\tau\epsilon$. Well, the noun \logos means "word" or "something said." The expression later in the verse may help to explain this word. It says, "....." Most scholars believe that this unique word $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\lambda\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota\tau\epsilon$ conveys a meaning of babbling, speak without thinking, talking idly.

Is Jesus referring here to a meaningly babble that is not understand on earth or in heaven? Perhaps. Is He talking about a meaningless repetition of His name like some kind of Christian mantra: Oh Father, heavenly Father, we thank you, Father, for this day, heavenly Father. Or people who chant "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus," over and over again. Perhaps. Is Jesus talking about the constant repetition of prayers, one after the other, like "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name," "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name," "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name." Is Jesus talking about that meaningless repetition? Perhaps.

But remember the context for these words of Jesus is people who are seeking attention from others rather than making our Father in heaven the center of attention. Have you ever been talking to someone and they weren't really listening? They weren't paying attention. Maybe your husband says he's listening, but really he's watching the ball game or reading the newspaper. I know. I'm on dangerous ground here! And he talks back to you with grunts, or

brief comments like “uh huh,” and “yes, dear.” He’s making sounds but his mind is somewhere else. And when you challenge him with “What did I just say to you?” he looks kind of startled and hopefully says, “I’m sorry, I wasn’t really listening. Can you say that again?” Do you know what I’m talking about?

Perhaps it’s possible to pray like that too. Words are coming out, but the person isn’t really thinking about what is being said. His or her attention is somewhere else. And in the context of what Jesus is talking about, they’re probably wondering if others are noticing them! Speaking words without thinking. Just wanting to be the center of attention.

Jesus says, “Don’t pray like that.” Let’s read again the summary statement of the Master Teacher recorded in Matthew 6:1. “.....” Don’t pray to draw attention to yourself. Pray to bring glory to God. Let your Father in heaven be the center of attention.

Some people are a little confused by the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:8. Oh, the first part of the sentence is clear—“Do not be like them,” but what about the second half of the sentence? “For your Father knows what you need before you ask him” Is Jesus saying that it is wrong to ask for anything in prayer because our Father in heaven already knows what we need? Is that what Jesus is saying? No. In another place, Jesus says, “Ask and you will receive.” There is nothing wrong in asking. But you don’t need to ask Him over and over and over and over again. Don’t use pseudo prayer babble!

In the 5 verses that follow, Jesus gives us a model for prayer that is so important, so helpful as a guide for our prayer life, that I’m going to devote a whole message to that passage next week. Many Christians refer to this model prayer recorded in the great sermon on the mount as the Lord’s Prayer. Perhaps we should actually call it “The Disciples’ Prayer” or the

prayer that the Lord gave to His followers. We'll study this amazing model for prayer next week, and I hope you can join us.

But let's look now at the third act of devotion that Jesus highlights in this section of His great sermon on the mount. We've looked at giving to the needy, and with that we might add other acts of service, we've looked at prayer, and now, starting with Matthew 6:16, we're going to look at fasting.

Let's read together, from Matthew 6:16. (First part) "....."

What is the purpose of fasting anyway? Well, there are fasts that people go on to lose weight or to improve their health. There are fasts to make a political statement. We call that kind of fast ahunger strike. But a biblical fast described here is an abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. An abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. The purpose it to clear the mind and to focus on God, His Word and His will. Daniel went on a partial fast, as recorded in Dan 10:3. He still had a full-time job, so he couldn't abstain from food entirely. He ate simple food, limited variety, and perhaps limited quantity. Enough to provide strength for the demands of the day. A simple partial fast might be fruit, or whole wheat bread and water. Jesus gives us an example of a normal fast. No food to eat. Just water to drink. Esther gives us an example of an absolute fast in a time of emergency, crying out to God. No food. No water.

No one type of fast is more holy than another. Whether a partial fast, a normal fast, or an absolute fast, the purpose is the same—to clear the mind and to focus on God. And Jesus tells us, in Matthew 6:16, "....."

Is there any reward when you fast like that? What does Jesus say at the end of Matthew 6:16. "....." What is the reward that a person receives who is fasting in such a way

as to be noticed by others? What is their reward? The attention that they are seeking.

But Jesus says, “When you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting.” Take a shower. Comb your hair. Look neat and tidy! Don’t draw attention to the fact that you are fasting.

Don’t fast to bring attention to yourself, Jesus says. How can you focus on God when you are preoccupied with what other people think about you? How can you be attentive to God when you are constantly looking around to see if anyone is noticing you? Jesus continues in Matthew 6:17-18, “.....”

Some weeks ago, my wife was impressed to fast and pray for a young lady who was in crisis. This young lady was hanging out with bad company, and her life was in a downward spiral. My wife didn’t walk about wearing a T-shirt which said, “Please notice me! I’m fasting today!” She mentioned to me that she would be fasting and praying for this young lady, but she didn’t say it like this: “I’m going to be fasting today so less holy people like you will have to fix your own food!” She didn’t act like that. She wanted God to be the center of attention, not her.

And do you know what happened. The very day that my wife was fasting and praying, that very day, that young woman’s boyfriend, who was very bad influence on her—he told her that he didn’t want to date her anymore. He dumped her. He told her that he didn’t want to hang out with her anymore. From a human perspective, I was hoping that she would dump him! That day, while my wife was fasting and praying for this young lady, Jesus carried her one more step on the road to freedom. Some one ought to say “Hallelujah” out there. Call upon me, the Lord says, and I will deliver you and you will glorify Me.”

I don’t share that story to bring attention to my wife. Rather I share that story to remind

you that God calls us to fasting and prayer. “When you fast,” Jesus says. Not if you fast. Not don’t fast. But when you fast. Just remember, when you do fast, don’t fast to bring attention to yourself. Let your Father in heaven be the center of attention!

What did Jesus, the Master Teacher, say at the beginning of this section of His great sermon on the mount. Let’s read again from Matthew 6:1. “.....” There’s a vital lesson contained in this message for each one of us. In all your acts of devotion, let your Father in heaven be the center of attention. When you are performing an act of service, whether giving an offering, or serving a meal at a disaster site, let your Father in heaven be the center of attention. When you are praying, whether in public or in private, let your Father in heaven be the center of attention. When you are fasting, whether for a day or a week, with simple food or no food at all, let your Father in heaven be the center of attention. Because when your Father in heaven is the center of attention, you will be blessed with heavenly blessings. Did you hear me? When your Father in heaven is the center of attention, you will be blessed with heavenly blessings!

WALKING WITH JESUS - PART 6
The Disciples' Prayer
Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: Matthew 6:9-13
Subject: How Jesus taught His disciples to pray
Complement: as personal communication with their Father in heaven.
Exegetical idea: Jesus taught His disciples to pray as personal communication with their Father in heaven.
Homiletical idea: **Prayer is personal communion with our Father in heaven.**
Purpose: To encourage my hearers let Jesus teach them how to pray, as personal communion with our Father in heaven.

Have you ever seen something and really wanted it for yourself? That's what happened to the disciples one day. What they saw wasn't a material item, like something to eat or an earthly treasure. What the disciples saw was a dynamic connection between earth and heaven. And when they saw that dynamic connection between earth and heaven, they really wanted it for themselves. So when Jesus had finished his time of private prayer, His disciples came to Him and said, "Lord, teach us to pray!"

The disciples had prayed before, don't you think? They knew some things about prayer. But they were longing for a dynamic connection between earth and heaven like the one they saw when Jesus prayed. That's why they came to Jesus with the plea, "Lord, teach us to pray!"

Have you ever wished that you could ask Jesus that same question? "Lord, please teach me to pray!" In response to the request of His disciples, Jesus repeated a model for prayer that He had first given as part of His sermon on the mount. We're going to study that model for prayer today.

This is part 6 of our study on the great sermon of Jesus, the sermon on the mount. We

have entitled this series Walking with Jesus. In part 5 of our series, you'll remember that Jesus taught us not to pray in a way that draws attention to ourselves. And don't pray with meaningless repetitions, babbling, thinking that God will hear us because of our many words. Now, starting in Matthew 6:9, Jesus gives a model for prayer. Let's begin by reading the entire prayer together, starting with the words "Our Father," in Matthew 6:9. "....."

Before we study this model for prayer in greater detail, I want to draw our attention to the first phrase in Matthew 6:9. What does Jesus say? "In this manner." Is there anything wrong with praying this prayer word for word? Certainly not. You can repeat the exact words recorded in Matthew 6:9-13 in less than a minute, and that would be a meaningful prayer if you prayed with a heart open to our Heavenly Father. But what if you are going to pray for 10 minutes, or 30 minutes, or an hour. Should you just repeat this prayer 10, 30, or 60 times! Even this prayer that Jesus gave to us could become a meaningless repetition, if you repeated it over and over and over again? No! That could easily become meaningless repetitions. A type of "praying" that Jesus warned us about.

So don't miss those first words in Matthew 6:9. "In this manner." Jesus is giving us a model for prayer, an outline, a format. Today, in our study, we are going to examine this model for prayer more closely. I have provided you with an outline of this prayer on the back page of your bulletin insert. I encourage you to take notes so that you can review this material at a later date. And more than that. I want to encourage you to practice what you learn. As you walk with Jesus, let Jesus teach you how to pray.

Let's go back to the beginning of this model for prayer and notice how it begins. "Our Father in heaven." Some Christians have repeated this prayer so many times that we miss the

deep significance of those words. Remember, the expression Father in heaven appears for the first time in Scripture in this great sermon of Jesus. Jesus is giving us a new and intimate way of relating to Almighty God. “Our Father in heaven.” I have heard some people pray, “My Father in heaven” and that is certainly true. He is your Father in heaven. What a wonderful truth! The God of all creation is your Father in heaven! But don’t forget that He is not only your Father in heaven. He is our Father in heaven. That one simple phrase connects us all together. That one simple phrase should break down all of the walls that divide us. That one simple phrase should dispel all bigotry and prejudice and social elitism and religious arrogance. No one little group on this planet has a monopoly on Almighty God! He is our Father in heaven.

The prayer that follows naturally divides into two parts. The first part focuses on our Father in heaven; the second part presents our needs. So if your taking notes in the sermon outline, write down that first major heading: Focus on our Father in heaven.

Let’s read Matthew 6:9-10 again. Let’s read together. “.....” Did you notice that one word is repeated three times? What is it? “Your.” Your name. Your kingdom. Your will. You just outlined the first half of this model for prayer. Your name. Your kingdom. Your will. You may want to write those three sub-sections in your sermon outline: Your name, Your kingdom, Your will. We will explain them in greater detail as we continue our study together.

So as we begin our time of prayer, our time of personal communion with our Father in heaven, we pray “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.” What does that mean? Hallowed by Your name? The verb is ἁγιασθήτω, from the noun ἅγιος which means “holy.” Our Father in heaven. Holy is Your name! What is Jesus teaching us to do as we begin our personal

communion with our Father in heaven? Praise Him. Praise Him! How shall we praise Him? With our whole hearts! I love to pray with words of Scripture. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name! I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth. Jesus began his brief prayer recorded in Luke 10:21 with these words: “ I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth.”

Remember to begin your prayer time, your personal communion with your Father in heaven, by praising Him! How do many prayers begin? Requesting. Complaining. Whining. Let Jesus teach you how to pray. Begin by focusing on your Father in heaven, and praise Him! I was told that a great man of prayer who lived in my home town of Bristol, England, was once asked how long he praised God in prayer. Do you know what George Mueller answered? “I praise Him until my heart is glad!” I like that response. Our Father in heaven, hallowed by Your name. Begins your prayers with praise!

What is the next sub-section of this first part of the prayer? “Your kingdom come.” Which kingdom is Jesus referring to here? The answer should be obvious from our study of the great sermon on the mount! Which kingdom is Jesus referring to here? The kingdom of heaven. So what does it mean when we pray as part of our personal communion with our Father in heaven, “Your kingdom come”? Your kingdom come in my own life today. I surrender wholly to you today. Because the kingdom of heaven is in our midst. The kingdom of heaven is a present reality. When you receive Jesus as your personal Savior, you are part of the kingdom of heaven. But the kingdom of heaven is also a future reality. The kingdom of glory, which is to come, when Jesus returns in all of His glory. We can also pray “Your kingdom come” as we long for the glorious return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

How many of you are looking forward to the glorious return of Jesus? A time when, according to Scripture, there will be no more death, no more sorrow, no more crying, no more pain! “Your kingdom come!” But remember, if you want to be a part of the glorious kingdom which is coming, you need to be a part of the kingdom of heaven today! You need to trust Jesus today as your Savior and Lord. So as part of our personal communion with our Father in heaven, we pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come!”

If that is all that we pray, that is a powerful prayer, isn't it? Powerful! Praising our Father in heaven with our whole heart, and praying for His kingdom to come, in our own lives, in the lives of those around us, and for His glorious kingdom to come! Powerful!

What's the third sub-section of this first part of the prayer that Jesus gave to His disciples, and also to us? Your name, Your kingdom.....? Your will. “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” It seems to me that this should be a part of the prayer where we are listening and not just talking. If prayer, as Jesus shares it with us here, is a time of personal communion with our Father in heaven, doesn't it make sense to you that we listen as well as talk?

I remember a great man of God who used to wake up in the morning and the first thing that he would do was pray, personal communion with our Father in heaven. Part of that prayer time was listening, and this man of God had a pad of paper and a pen ready to write down specific thoughts that would come to his mind. “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Now, I'm not suggesting that any thoughts that comes ricocheting through your head is a direct message from the Lord. You need to use your reason. You need to seek counsel from godly counselors. But I do believe that our Father in heaven wants you to live, to walk, in the center of

His will. Don't you believe that? We need to take time to listen as we pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The name of an individual may come to your mind. The Holy Spirit may bring a passage of Scripture to your remembrance. Listen. Be attentive. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Do you notice that we haven't started reading our shopping list yet? The whole first part of this prayer is focusing on our Father in heaven. We begin with praise! Hallowed be Your name. We pray Your kingdom come, in my life, in the lives of those around me, and also may your glorious kingdom come! And Your will be done, in every aspect of my life, in my family, in my community, in our world, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

That's the first part of this great prayer that Jesus gave to His disciples. How long would it take to pray that first part of the prayer? 30 seconds? Possibly. Several hours. Possibly. That's the beauty of this model for prayer. It can be adjusted to any situation. Jesus didn't just repeat the same words over and over again when He prayed all night. A model for prayer can help you as you spend extended time in prayer. Listen carefully to what you are learning today. Let Jesus teach you how to pray!

What about the second half of the prayer? The first half is Focusing on our Father in heaven: Your name, Your kingdom, Your will. The second half of this prayer is Presenting our needs. Let's read Matthew 6:11-13 together. "....." Did you notice a word repeated in this second half of the prayer? "Us." It is actually repeated 4 times, but I'm going to suggest 3 sub-sections to this second half of the prayer, with the 3rd and 4th "us" joined together.

If you are taking notes, we are in the second half of the prayer, Presenting our needs. What is the first sub-section? Give us. "Give us this day our daily bread." This is a request that

our physical needs be met. Give us this day our daily bread. Unfortunately, Christians have repeated these words so often that I'm afraid we've missed their significance. What is the significance of those words? Who are you to make any request of Almighty God? Who do you think you are? Answer? According to Jesus, we are children of our Father in heaven. Later in this same great sermon of Jesus, He will tell us in Matthew 7:11, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him."

Prayer is a personal communion with our Father in heaven. After we have taken time to focus on Him, His name, His kingdom, His will, it is appropriate to present our needs. "Give us this day our daily bread." I have a question for you. Why not simply pray, "Give us bread!" Or "Give us a year's supply of bread!" Why, "Give us this day our daily bread?" Perhaps it is important for us to recognize our daily dependence upon our Father in heaven. What do you think?

What is the second sub-section of Presenting our needs? Forgive us. "And forgive us our debts and we forgive our debtors." We could spend a whole message just on that sentence. But let's get the main point. We not only have physical needs. We have spiritual needs. We need forgiveness. We need cleansing. Am I speaking the truth today? We don't just need bread. We cannot live by bread alone. We need forgiveness. Please note that there is a correlation between our experience of forgiveness and the way we forgive others. Write this text down for some further study. Matthew 18:21-35. Matthew 18:21-35. I want to suggest to you that those who have experienced the forgiveness of our Father in heaven will act in a forgiving way to those around them. Jesus said, The one who has been forgiven much loves much.

Followers of Jesus ought to be the most forgiving people on the planet. Did you hear me? Followers of Jesus ought to be the sweetest people in the neighborhood. If you are full of bitterness and anger and resentment, Jesus loves you just as you are, but He doesn't want to leave you there! Jesus wants to heal you. Jesus wants to set you free. Jesus wants to bless you. And then Jesus wants to pour rivers of blessing through you to those around you. Yes, even to those who hurt you. Even to those who don't deserve those blessings. Because we have been blessed beyond what we deserve, haven't we?

Give us. Forgive us. And then the third sub-section of Presenting our Needs. "And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one." Deliver us. We not only have physical needs and spiritual needs, but we have a need for deliverance. And I have good news for you today. Our Father in heaven is able to deliver us from the evil one. Yes, He is. He is able. More than able. Call upon Me, He says. Call upon Me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you. And you will honor me. Psalm 50:15

In this part of the prayer, you might want to put on the whole armor of God. You can read about that armor in Ephesians 6:11-18. If you have never studied about that armor, write that passage down for further study. Ephesians 6:11-18. Our Father in heaven wants us to supply all of our needs: physical needs, spiritual needs, and the need for deliverance, the need for spiritual power and spiritual protection.

How long has it taken us to pray this model for prayer? 60 seconds. Possibly. And that short prayer can be very meaningful as part of **personal communion with our Father in heaven**. But this prayer could also take 60 minutes, or more. It all depends on how much time you have available, time to spend in personal communion with our Father in heaven.

That's really the message in this prayer that Jesus gives to His disciples. Prayer is not a way to draw attention to yourself. Prayer is not a babbling of meaningless repetitions. **Prayer is personal communion with our Father in heaven. Prayer is personal communion with our Father in heaven**

What a precious gift! My appeal to you today is simply this: Let Jesus teach you how to pray. Experience personal communion with our Father in heaven! Let Jesus teach you how to pray.

WALKING WITH JESUS - PART 7

Out of Focus

Dr. Derek Morris

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Preaching passage: | Matthew 6:19-24 |
| Subject: | How a person will live who serves God rather than earthly riches |
| Complement: | lay up treasure in heaven rather than on earth. |
| Exegetical idea: | When a person serves God rather than riches, he/she will lay up treasure in heaven rather than treasure on earth. |
| Homiletical idea: | If you're serving God rather than the things of this world, you'll be focused on laying up treasure in heaven rather amassing more and more treasure on earth. |
| Purpose: | To encourage my hearers to focus on wants God wants for their lives: serving Him and laying up treasure in heaven. |

I brought some pictures to show you from my recent trip to India. They're all on this tiny thumb drive. Amazing! Modern technology! I'm not much of a photographer, but this new digital camera makes taking pictures a lot easier! They could almost market this model as a "Camera for Dummies!" But I'm not sure if the marketing slogan would work too well!

If you take a picture with this camera and it's all blurry and out of focus, no one ever needs to know. You can just delete it! Only print the good ones!

Do some of you more mature listeners remember the days when you would get your pictures back from Kodak, or wherever you mailed them, and you quickly scanned them to see which ones came out well and which ones were out of focus? Nobody wants to look at a picture that is out of focus. It's almost worse than no picture at all. Isn't it?

But I'm here to tell you today that there is something worse than a picture that is out of focus. Something much more serious. It's a life that is out of focus. Jesus addresses the problem of a life being out of focus in the portion of His great sermon on the mount that we are going to study today.

And Jesus gives us 3 reasons why we should not let earthly treasures be the focus of our lives. The first two reasons are found in Matthew 6:19 and repeated in Matthew 6:20. The third and most important reason why we should not let earthly riches be the focus of our lives found in Matthew 6:21.

Let's read Matthew 6:19 again. "....." Earthly treasures are transitory. They can pass away. They can be here today and gone tomorrow. One reason why we should not let earthly treasures be the focus of our lives is the fact that moths and rust can destroy those treasures. The verb used here literally means to cause them to disappear. If Jesus was speaking today here in Florida, he might have said, "Termites and rust and corrupt corporate executives can cause your earthly treasures to disappear"! If you allow the amassing of more and more earthly treasures to be the focus of your life, you are going to be sorely disappointed.

And there's a second reason that we should not allow earthly treasures to be the focus of our lives, and that's found at the end of Matthew 6:19. Thieves can break in and steal your earthly treasures. The Greek word for thief is $\lambda\acute{\omicron}\nu\theta\acute{\iota}\alpha\varsigma$ and the verb "to steal" is $\lambda\acute{\omicron}\nu\theta\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ from which we get the English word kleptomaniac! They had them back then and we still have them today. You work hard for things and then kleptomaniacs steal them from you! Those thieves may not want your earthly treasure at all, but they want the money or the power that it can bring them.

My wife today me yesterday that there has been a series of robberies recently at self-storage facilities. Stealing the earthly treasures that wouldn't even fit in people's houses! In one storage unit, the thieves found a bag that contained \$30,000 in cash. I'm not sure what a bag of cash was doing in a self-storage unit, though I have my suspicions. Maybe all of the closets at

home were already full! But whatever the reason, the bag of cash was taken, along with many other items from other storage units by a young band of kleptomaniacs. These young men didn't need everything that they were taking. But they had become addicted to amassing more and more treasure. Their lives were out of focus, just like many of the people that they were robbing from.

If amassing more and more earthly treasure is the focus on your life, you'll be heart-broken when moths or rust or corrupt corporate executives cause those treasures to disappear or when thieves take those treasures away from you. So don't continually focus on amassing treasure on earth. That's what Jesus says. Because moths and rust and corrupt corporate executives can cause your treasures to disappear, and thieves can steal your earthly treasures.

But the third and most important reason why we should not let amassing earthly treasures be the focus of our lives is found in Matthew 6:21. Let's read the words of Jesus together.

“.....”

Some months ago, an individual made a generous donation so that we could film our Life and Teachings of Jesus class for Hope TV. I have received several e-mails this week from around the world from individuals and groups who are using those materials to learn more about Jesus! Is the individual who gave that initial donation staying awake at night worried if that investment will be fruitful? Not at all. Is that individual worried whether that money donated will disappear or be stolen. No. That treasure has been laid up in heaven. When you lay up treasure in heaven, instead of worrying about losing it, you'll be looking forward to finding out what a difference that investment has made in the lives of hundreds of people around the world!

Some of you invested in helping Emmanuela to go as a missionary to West Africa. I

doubt if you're that God will keep your money safe. You're praying that God will keep Emmanuela safe. Your heart will be focused on things of eternal value.

It's crucially important as we walk with Jesus to focus on laying up treasure in heaven rather than continually focusing on laying up treasure on earth. Not only can earthly treasure disappear, or be stolen. But where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

But Jesus isn't finished with this topic. Many simply pass over the next verse in Jesus' sermon. I've never heard anyone explain this text before. But I want us to examine the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 6:22-23. I'm convinced that these words are directly related to what Jesus has just said in Matthew 6:19-21.

Let's read the words of Jesus together, starting with Matthew 6:22.

“.....” What is Jesus trying to tell us here? What does He mean when He says that the lamp of the body is the eye? If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.

I think that Jesus is talking here about focus. If your life is in focus, your whole body will be affected positively. Conversely, if your life is out of focus, your whole body will be affected negatively. Being obsessed with amassing earthly riches isn't simply going to affect the way you distribute your money. It isn't just going to affect the amount that you give or don't give in tithes and offerings. If your life is out of focus in regards to earthly riches versus heavenly riches, other areas of your life will be affected. Your relationships with others will be affected. The way that you spend your time will be affected. The way that you exert your influence over others will be affected. If the eye is good, the whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, if your life is out of focus, your whole body will be full of darkness.

So how do I make sure than my life is in focus, rather than out of focus? How do I make sure that I focus on laying up treasure in heaven rather than being obsessed with laying up treasure on earth? I believe that the answer is found in the final words of Jesus in this part of His sermon, recorded in Matthew 6:24. These words of Jesus are often quoted in isolation from verses 19-23, but the thoughts are related. Let's read Matthew 6:24 together.

“.....”

Do you agree with Jesus that no one can serve two masters? Well, you say, “it depends.” Many of us report to more than one person at work. We may not call them “master” but they have authority over us. They direct our activities. They tell us what to do. But have you ever had to work in a situation where two people who had authority over you didn't agree with each other and they were both trying to tell you what to do? It's an impossible situation. Children can feel that way too when they are caught between two parents who don't agree wit each other.

I believe that is what Jesus has in mind here. No one can serve two masters who are diametrically opposed to each other. You either hate one and love the other. Loyal to one and despise the other. It's just not possible to serve two masters who are diametrically opposed to each other.

And then Jesus concludes: You cannot serve God and mammon. The NIV translates it this way: “You cannot serve both God and Money.” Money, earthly riches, earthly treasure, is not a god. Money is an inanimate object. But it can become a god. It can become the object of your worship. And if that happens, your life is out of focus. And every area of your life will be affected. Every area. If the eye is bad, the whole body will be full of darkness.

So the question that I want to ask you this morning is a simple one: Who are you serving?

I know that you are here in church today. But you are you serving in your life? Is God first in your life? Have you invited God to be Lord of all in your life? If so, you'll be more concerned about laying up treasure in heaven rather than simply amassing treasure on earth. But if you're constantly preoccupied with earthly riches, there's a good chance that your life is out of focus. You're not really serving God at all. Someone or something else has usurped the place at the center of your life that belongs only to God.

I don't want my life to be out of focus. I don't want your life to be out of focus either. And it can easily happen, you know. I want to serve God with my whole heart. Don't you? I want to focus on laying up treasure in heaven rather than just amassing treasure on earth. Don't you?

I did bring a few pictures to show you from my recent trip to India. I want to introduce you to Urmi. Fortunately, this picture is in focus. And Urmi's life is also in focus. Urmi was born into an upper middle class family in India. Her father was a physician. Her mother was a hospital administrator. Urmi had many advantages and could have spent her whole life becoming more and more affluent.

But Urmi decided to devote her life to something more than laying up treasure on earth. After completing an undergraduate degree in social work and a graduate degree in criminology, Urmi decided to start a special ministry in the city of Calcutta. She noticed that there were many children of sex workers wandering around in the red light district of Calcutta. No one seemed to care about these children. So Urmi found an upstairs room at the end of a dark alley in the red light district in Calcutta and she started a ministry for the children of sex workers. At 5:00 PM every evening, when their mothers are about to start their work, these children don't have to

wander the dark and dangerous alleys. They can come to that upper room. Urmi and her helpers bathe the children, feed them, and help them with their homework. About 90 children are enrolled in that program. Urmi calls that ministry New Life. And it really does bring new life to those children!

But that's not all that Urmi is doing. She just started another ministry for young girls. The red light district of Calcutta is not a safe place for those young girls to grow up. God touched the heart of a donor to send Urmi the money to purchase a 3-story building in a better neighborhood of Calcutta. Urmi named that home for girls Shoma House. It is currently home for 16 girls, ages 7-16. All are children of sex workers from the red light district. The oldest girl at Shoma House is about to finish high school. She wants to become a police officer! And she's an inspiration to the 15 younger girls at the home. One of the younger girls recited a poem for us. Her mother is a sex worker who is dying of AIDS. These two girls are sisters. They were rescued just days before they would have ended up in the quicksand where their mother lives and works.

God is using Urmi and her team to make a difference in the city of Calcutta. And my life was blessed as I witnessed first-hand what God was doing through them. I had the privilege of praying a blessing for Urmi last Sabbath afternoon. She is a living example of serving God with all your heart. She is not be obsessed with simply amassing more and more earthly treasure. She is laying up treasure in heaven.

I also visited some literacy projects that our sponsored by our church here in North America. This literacy project is located in Tamil Nadu, in southwest India. Do you see the young lady with the green top. I don't even know her name. But she shared her story, and there

was a beautiful smile on her face. She grew up in a fishing village. She was illiterate. No one wanted to marry her. But her life changed when she decided to participate in a literacy group conducted by a Seventh-day Adventist woman in her village. Typically, about 20 individuals attend each program, which meets 2 hours every evening, 5 days per week. The students attend at no charge. They learn how to read, and how to do basic math.

This young lady was smiling because she not only found a husband. She can help her husband to sell his fish at the market, without getting cheated. She can buy items at the market and is able to count the change. She can also read and sign her name. And because the materials are Bible based, this young lady also learned about Jesus. Today, she is the treasurer of the little Adventist group in her village. Do you see the book that she is holding in her hand? That's a Bible in the Tamil language. With a smile on her face, she read to me Psalm 23—The Lord is my shepherd.

And all that was possible because some people back in North America believe in laying up treasure in heaven, and because that young lady's teacher was willing to use her limited gifts and talents not just to amass more and more earthly treasure but to lay up treasure in heaven.

I asked this young lady why she is a facilitator of a literacy project that meets in her home. She has a profession as a lab technician at a hospital. She is more affluent than many of the laborers that she teaches. So why does she work all day and then devote two hours every evening, Sunday through Thursday to help Hindus, Moslems and Christians to learn how to read and do basic maths. Do you know what she told me? "I believe that it's something God wants me to do." That young lady is serving God. Her life is in focus. She is laying up treasure in heaven.

I had to show you this final picture. This literacy student is so proud of learning how to read, she decided to teach me Hindi. She is laughing because I'm illiterate and I'm not a very quick learner. I'm laughing because I can see so many changed lives. The head elder of this little Adventist church in eastern India has been elected as the president of the 13 villages of that region. That little church is making a difference. Their material possessions are limited. Their church is simple and unadorned. But they are serving God with their whole hearts and they are laying up treasure in heaven.

I'm not suggesting this morning that we should all move to India and start a ministry for the children of sex workers or run literacy projects. But I am asking you to take a look at your life today. Take a look at your priorities. Is your life in focus or out of focus? Are you serving God with all of your heart and all of your strength? Or are you a slave to earthly treasure?

Now I want to invite you to bow your head in prayer and ask God to show you how He wants you to serve Him with all of your strength. Ask God to show you how He wants you to lay up treasure in heaven.

Let's take a moment now to pray and listen.

Lord, thank you for speaking to us today. Now help us to do what You ask us to do.
Amen.

Children's story:

Taking pictures

How many of you boys and girls like to take pictures with a camera? Do anyone have your own camera or do you borrow a camera from your mommy or daddy? When I was a little boy, cameras were bigger and more complicated than this one. You had to make sure that enough light was coming into the lense of the camera or else that picture would be too bright or too dark. And you had to adjust the lense to make sure that the picture was in focus.

Have you ever sense a picture that is out of focus? It's all blurry. It doesn't look good at all. This camera is supposed to be auto-focus. That means that every picture is supposed to be clear and in focus. But I've discovered that your pictures can still be out of focus.

If I'm focusing on a bad book or a bad video game and then I turn and take a quick picture of Jesus, Jesus is all blurry. My picture of Jesus is all out of focus.

But if I'm focusing on Jesus, if I'm directing my attention toward Jesus, and a bad book or a bad video game gets in the picture, then the bad book is all blurry and my picture of Jesus is still in focus.

There was a little song that some of us learned when we were little, and the words are still true. It says, Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace." The writer could have used these words: " Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely blurry and out of focus, in the light of His glory and grace." That's not quite as easy to sing! But it's just as true. So remember, wherever you are, whatever you're doing, keep thinking about Jesus. He loves you, you know?

Walking with Jesus - Part 8
Stressed Out!
Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: Matt 6:25-33
Subject: What should we do rather than worry about our needs being met
Complements: seek the Lord, trusting that our loving Father in heaven will care for us.
Exegetical idea: Rather than constantly worrying about whether or not our needs will be supplied, we should seek the Lord, trusting that our loving Father in heaven will care for us.
Homiletical idea: **You have a loving Father in heaven who will care for you.**
Purpose: To encourage my hearers to find freedom from the stresses of this life by trusting that their loving Father in heaven will care for them.

Introduction

I felt really stressed out a few weeks ago. My wife can tell when I'm stressed out, by the way. I don't shout, or throw things. My lips turn a bluish purple color. I'm serious. At least, that's what my wife tells me! Well, I was stressed out a few weeks ago. I was beginning a long trip to India. The first part of my trip involved a flight from Orlando to Washington, DC. I arrived at the airport here in Orlando in plenty of time. At least, I thought that I had plenty of time. But as I walked into the airport terminal, I saw this huge line. I mean HUGE! At first, I was in denial. This must be a line for some other airline! But no. It was my airline! My blood pressure began to rise. If there had been a mirror available, I'm sure that I would have noticed that my lips were starting to change color! I made my way to the back of the line, and waited. And waited. And waited. After waiting in that line for almost an hour and a half, I wasn't even halfway to the ticket counter. By this time I had learned of a storm in Chicago that had shut down O'Hare airport. Hundreds of people needed to reschedule their flights. And most of those people were in my line. In front of me! At times, people shouted at each other. Tempers flared.

It was ugly! I calculated how far I have moved in 90 minutes, did the math (look at my watch) and it was obvious that there was no way that I was going to catch my flight. I was stressed out!

Have you ever felt like that? Stressed out! You say, “Pastor, I feel stressed out all the time!” Or you might say, “No. I’m fine. But I live with someone who is stressed out! And, come to think of it, that stresses me out!” Or, perhaps you have a good friend who is stressed out!” Then Jesus has some counsel for us today that will bless our lives, and bless our families, and bless those around us.

We find this counsel of Jesus recorded in His great sermon on the mount. We’ve been studying this great sermon of Jesus for the past few weeks in a series entitled Walking with Jesus. And today, we have come to the portion of the sermon recorded by the apostle Matthew in Matt 6, beginning with verse 25. Let’s read the words of Jesus together, beginning with Matthew 6:25. “.....”

Apparently, some of the people that Jesus was speaking to were really stressed out about where their next meal was coming from. Living in a land of plenty, few of us are stressed out about whether we are going to have anything to eat or whether we are going to have anything to drink. But may I remind you that there may be some people listening to this message via our web church or via television who live in parts of the world where finding enough food to eat and clean water to drink is a real stressor.

But most of us aren’t stressed out about where our next meal is coming from, are we? We have more than enough to eat and drink. Maybe even too much to eat and drink. If we’re stressed out about food and drink at all, it’s probably for other reasons. Like the story of Martha, recorded in Luke 10:38-42. “.....” Martha was stressed out not because she didn’t

have enough to eat or drink. She was stressed out trying to provide what she thought was the appropriate food and drink for her guest.

But Jesus said, “Don’t be stressed out by what you’re going to eat or what you’re going to drink.” Apparently, others who were listening to Jesus that day were stressed out about what they should wear. Most of those subsistence farmers and fishermen who were listening to Jesus didn’t have huge wardrobes. They had one or two garments to protect them from the heat of the day and the cold of the nights. Perhaps they had a reason to feel stressed out about their clothing. And perhaps there are people today in some parts of the world who are stressed by the need to have adequate clothing.

But again, most of us aren’t really stressed out about not having any clothes to wear. We have closets full of clothes, though some of us get stressed out about what color to wear, or what style is “in”. But the truth is that most of us don’t get stressed out about what we’re going to wear.

Well, if most of us here aren’t stressed out by where our next meal is coming from, or finding clean drinking water, or whether we’ll have anything to wear, what are some of the issues that stress us out?

Steve and Mary were stressed out when they got a phone call at 5:00 AM. Their youngest son Jonathan had been in a terrible motorcycle accident. Jonathan lost control of his motorcycle at about 150 mph. Fortunately, he was wearing his helmet and heavy clothing. But at 150 mph, his ankles were shattered when he hit the ground and his legs were ripped open. He slid for 700 feet, wearing out his helmet until it was so thin that you could see through it. Can you imagine getting a phone call like that about one of your children? That could stress you out

too.

A young mother here at Forest Lake Church was stressed out about a financial challenge. Her son was finally able to attend a Seventh-day Adventist Christian school, and he was flourishing in a caring Christian educational environment, but she didn't have the funds to pay her son's tuition fees. She was hoping against hope for a child support check, but it didn't come. That could stressed you out!

Rachel was stressed out by a health challenge. She went to the dentist for some routine dental work, only to find out that she had a tumor on the roof of her mouth. Way in the back. It didn't hurt. No negative side-effects. At least, not yet. But the dentist referred her to an oral surgeon who told her that she would need surgery, and soon. If the tumor was malignant, and if it had affected the bone, the surgery could be extensive. She might have trouble speaking and swallowing. Now, that could stress you out.

There are many challenges in life besides food, water and clothes that can potentially stress us out, aren't there? Whatever challenge you are facing right now that could stress you out, Jesus has some counsel for you. Don't be anxious about those things! Don't get stressed out about those things! Why? Because they are unimportant. No. They may be very important. Why then shouldn't we get stressed out about those challenges?

Jesus gives us two reasons why we shouldn't be stressed out about challenges that we face in our lives. Listen to the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:27. "....."

What's the answer? No! So what is the first reason why we shouldn't be stressed out by the challenges that we face. Nothing constructive is accomplished by being stressed out!

So don't get stressed out about what to eat, or drink, or wear, or about your children, or

about financial challenges, or about health problems, or any other challenge you might face because nothing useful is accomplished by worry.

But there is a second reason why we should be stressed out by challenges that we face in life. Listen to the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 6:26 and 28-33. “.....”

What is the second reason why we shouldn't get stressed out by the challenges that we face in life? Because we have a loving Father in heaven who will care for us. Did you hear me? We have a loving Father in heaven who will care for us. Instead of getting stressed out, we need to focus on our loving Heavenly Father, His kingdom, and His righteousness. You have a loving Father in heaven who will care for you. You have a Savior who will care for you. Instead of getting stressed out, which doesn't do any good, remember that God will take care of you.

The apostle Paul has this word of counsel for the followers of Jesus in Philippi. Phil 4:6-7. “.....” Instead of getting stressed out, remember that your Father in heaven will care for you.

Do remember when I was stuck in that huge line at the airport? There was no way that I was going to catch my flight. No way. So I called my wife and told her that she might as well be prepared to come back to the airport and pick me up again. She encouraged me to implement some of my assertiveness training! But I was intimidated. People were upset. Frustrated. Impatient. Then I prayed a simple prayer. I don't remember the exact words, but I went something like this: “Lord, I choose to trust You.”

You see, if God wanted me on that plane, He would open the way. If not, I didn't want to be on that plane anyway. Perhaps there was some other lesson I needed to learn. So I simply cried out to God, “Lord, I choose to trust You.”

I walked over to a airline customer service agent and said, “My plane is leaving in a few minutes. I’ve been waiting here for more than 1.5 hours. I need a paper ticket so I can catch my plane. Can you help me?” And something remarkable happened. The customer service agent actually helped me. He escorted me to the counter, I had my ticket in less than 90 seconds, having waited for 90 minutes, got through security, and made it to the gate just as they started loading the plane. And as the plane taxied down the runway, I remembered that I needed to trust that our Heavenly Father will care for all of our needs.

Some of you have faced and are facing much greater challenges than the possibility of missing a flight. Remember Steve and Mary? Their son Jonathan, who was in that terrible motorcycle accident, he should have died on the side of the highway that morning. When the emergency medical personnel found him, his feet were almost ripped off. His open wounds were jammed full of mud and debris. He had lost half of his blood supply. Their son went through 13 surgeries in the next 15 days, lasting 3-12 hours each. His father, Steve, told me that he was stressed out during that time! And as a father, I can understand. But Steve told me that there was a word of God that blessed his life during this difficult time. Phil 4:6-7.

“.....” Steve held on to this precious truth: we have a loving Father in heaven who will care for us.

And that young mother who didn’t know what to do about her son’s school fees. She was still hoping to get a child support check so that her son could continue in a wonderful Christian school. Instead of getting stressed out, she decided to come to prayer meeting back in January and asked for special prayer. Instead of being stressed out, she chose to remember that she has a loving Father in heaven who will care for her and her son. The child support check didn’t arrive,

but that young mother did find out that she was going to receive an income tax refund that would more than cover the tuition costs! And that's not all. She recently did receive a child support check that was also more than the amount needed to cover her son's school fees! Maybe she will need those funds for next school year!

What about Rachel? What happened with her tumor? Well, Rachel chose to come to prayer meeting two weeks ago and requested anointing. That's a special service outlined in James 5. We humbly ask the Lord to grant us whatever blessing that He knows we need, according to His will, not ours. We had the privilege as a prayer group of gathering around Rachel and praying the blessing of heaven upon her as she was anointed with oil in the name of the Lord.

Just this past Wednesday, Rachel came to prayer meeting again. And here is the record of her testimony. (Read e-mail)

So is the challenge over? We don't know. Rachel had surgery yesterday. The prognosis looks good. But whatever the future holds, Rachel has chosen not to be stressed out! That doesn't accomplish anything anyway, does it? Rachel has chosen to remember that she has a loving Father in heaven who will care for her!

What challenge are you facing in your life today? What unmet need is present in your life that could stress you out? I encourage you today to remember this precious truth: You have a loving Father in heaven who will care for you!

Does that mean that everything will be easy? No. Does that mean that you'll never have any challenges? No! But it means that whatever you face, not enough food to eat, no clean water to drink, nothing to wear, troubles with your children, financial challenges, health problems...you don't have to get stressed out. It doesn't do any good. Rather you can choose to remember that you have a loving Father in heaven who will care of you.

Walking with Jesus - Part 9
Receiving God's Good Gifts
Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: Matt 7:7-11
Subject: What happens when we ask, seek, and knock from our Father in heaven
Complements: He will give us good gifts.
Exegetical idea: When we ask, seek, and knock, our Father in heaven will give us good gifts.
Homiletical idea: **Receive the good gifts that your Father in heaven has for you!**
Purpose: To help my hearers to understand that the primary good gifts that our Father in heaven has for us our the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Introduction

My wife and I love to sing Scripture songs! That's no surprise to those of you who know us well! Bodil started composing Scripture songs about 20 years ago when our children were young and we've been singing Scripture songs ever since! As a result of those Scripture songs, my life and my family has been profoundly blessed by the Word of God!

But the first Scripture song that I memorized was several years before I even met the daring young American woman who would later become my wife! I had just committed my life to Jesus and I was a student at a Christian college in England. I had given away all of my secular music, and I was starting my walk with Jesus. This was the Scripture song that I learned. I didn't know at the time who composed the music, but the lyrics are the words of Jesus.

Sing it with me, if you know the song!

Ask, and it shall be given unto you

Seek, and ye shall find

Knock and it shall be opened unto you, Allelu, allelujah!

Those words of Jesus are recorded in Matthew 7: 7.

Those words of Jesus are taken from His great sermon on the mount. We have been studying this great sermon of Jesus from week to week in our series entitled Walking with Jesus, and today we are going to study the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 7:7-11. If you have a copy of the great sermon of Jesus, I invite you to read the words of Jesus out loud with me.

Matthew 7:7. “.....” And then in the lyrics to her song, Karen Lafferty added the Hebrew word Alleluia, which means...? Praise the LORD!

Tell me, What is Jesus talking about here? (Repeat verse) Is Jesus telling us that we can ask for anything, and it will be given to us! Anything? Is Jesus telling us that we can seek for anything, and we will find it! That certainly hasn't worked for me on numerous occasions when I've lost things! Is Jesus telling us that we can knock on any door, and it will be opened for us! What do you think?

Fortunately, Jesus gives us a clue regarding **what** we should ask for, **what** we should seek, **what** we should knock on. Let's continue reading together, from Matthew 7:8.

“.....” Jesus uses an analogy from parenting. If your daughter asks for bread, will you give her a stone? If your son asks for a fish, will you give him a snake? What's the answer from a loving parent? No. You gladly give good gifts to your children. How much more, Jesus says, will your Father in heaven give good (gifts) to those who ask Him!

That expression “Father in heaven” is becoming quite familiar to us, isn't it? But don't forget that it is a brand new concept in the sermon on the mount. Jesus introduces us to God in a new and intimate way. Our Father in heaven. And so Jesus begins the wonderful model prayer that He taught His disciples with those words: “Our Father....in heaven. And we learned last week that we shouldn't be stressed out because we have a loving Father in heaven who will

care for us.

Here again in this portion of Jesus' great sermon on the mount we are reminded that we have a loving Father in heaven who will care for us. Ask, Jesus says. Seek. Knock. And if earthly parents love to give good gifts to their children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him.

So what are those good gifts that our Father in heaven wants us to ask for? What are those good gifts that our Father in heaven wants us to seek? What is it that our Father in heaven wants us to knock on? It has to be more than asking for a newer car or a pay raise at work! What are those good gifts that our Father in heaven wants us to ask for?

Any ideas? First, let me suggest that those good gifts are given in the context of our relationship with God as our Father in heaven. I want to propose to you today that there are **two** primary gifts that our Father in heaven has made available to us that we should ask for. Two primary gifts that we should personally receive. Neither of those two primary good gifts is mentioned specifically in this passage of Scripture, but both of those two primary gifts that our Father in heaven wants us to ask for are identified in the Word of God.

The first of those two gifts that our Father in heaven wants us to ask for is referred to in the words of Jesus, not here in His great sermon on the mount, but in another very well known passage of Scripture, John 3:16. Jesus is speaking here to a leader of the Jews named Nicodemus, and Jesus says, “.....”

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. I have a question for you. Was Jesus a good gift from our Father in heaven? Amen! Because with Jesus comes salvation! What did Jesus say in the second half of John 3:16? That whoever believes in Him should not

perish but have everlasting life! The primary good gift is not salvation, even though that is a wonderful gift! The primary good gift is not forgiveness for your sin and cleansing from your sin, even though those are also wonderful gifts. As good as those gifts are, the primary good gift is Jesus. Because without Jesus, there is no salvation. Without Jesus, there is no forgiveness. Without Jesus, there is no cleansing. There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. Acts 4:12 The apostle Paul declared, “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved!”

The primary good gift from our Father in heaven is His own Son, Jesus! So ask for Jesus. Seek Jesus. Knock and it shall be opened to you. Knock on what?! Jesus says, “I am the door.” In other words, invite Jesus to be your Savior. Ask for Jesus. Seek Jesus. Receive Jesus. Today, in a very sacred service that Jesus gave His followers, we are going to all have the opportunity to receive our Father in heaven’s primary good gift. We are going to have the opportunity to say “Yes” to Jesus! If you have never received the good gift of Jesus from our Father in heaven, today is a day that angels will sing with joy for you! That what Jesus said happens when one sinner comes home, when one sinner repents and turns to Jesus as Savior and Lord.

And if you have been walking with Jesus for many years, if you have received that primary good gift of Jesus from our Father in heaven, you are going to have the opportunity today to say “Yes” again to Jesus. You are going to have the opportunity today to reaffirm your decision to receive God’s good gift of Jesus, not only to the “world”, but to you personally!

But Jesus is not the only good gift that our Father in heaven has provided for us. What

did Jesus say in his great sermon on the mount? Let's read Matthew 7:11 again. Let's read the words of Jesus out loud together. "....."

You say, "Pastor, Jesus said that our Father in heaven would give "good gifts", literally good things, to those who ask Him. We've learned that Jesus is God's primary good gift. But the text says "good gifts" or "good things". It's in the plural. That means that there is at least one other primary good gift that our Father in heaven wants to give to those who ask Him.

What is another primary good gift that our Father in heaven wants to give to us, if we ask? Well, we don't have to guess. Jesus gives us the answer in another portion of the gospel record where He is restating the words found here in His great sermon on the mount. That restatement is found in Luke 11:9-13. There are some variations in the wording in this restatement by Jesus. It starts out the same, in Luke 11:9. "Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." But there is a variation in verses 11 and 12 of Luke 11. "....."

But the most important variation in Luke's record of this restatement by Jesus is the amplification provided by Jesus in Luke 11:13. Listen to the restatement by Jesus of the words also found in His great sermon on the mount. "....."

Instead of simply referring to "good things" or "good gifts" that our Father in heaven will give to those who ask Him, Jesus specifically names one of those primary good gifts. Did you notice that amplification in this restatement by Jesus? That's right. How much more will your heavenly Father give **the Holy Spirit** to those who ask Him.

A second primary good gift that our Father in heaven wants to give to those who ask Him is the gift of the Holy Spirit. What does Jesus mean when He says that our Father in heaven will

give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? Well, let's listen to the testimony of the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost. In Acts 2:38-39, we read, "....."

What happens to followers of Jesus, when they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? Jesus answers that question in Acts 1:8. "....." That testimony of Jesus is confirmed in Acts 4:31, where Dr. Luke records concerning the followers of Jesus, "....."

The followers of Jesus were even enabled to speak the Word of God boldly, even in other languages that they had not learned, according to Acts 2, because they had received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Those present on the day of Pentecost declared, "We hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." Acts 2:11

What an amazing gift! No. I'm not referring to the gift of speaking the Word of God boldly. Though that is an amazing gift. I'm not even referring to the gift of speaking in other tongues. Though that is also a marvelous gift. But I'm speaking about the other primary good gift that our Father in heaven will give to those who ask Him—the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Today, we are going to celebrate a sacred service that Jesus gave to His followers. Jesus took unleavened bread and unfermented wine and said, "This is my body. This is my blood" Jesus wasn't saying that the bread was real flesh and the grape juice real blood. They are symbols. And in taking these symbols, His followers had the opportunity to say "Yes" to God's good gift—the gift of Jesus as their Savior.

We're going to have the opportunity to receive those symbols of Jesus' broken body and shed blood today. We are going to have the opportunity to receive our Father in heaven's good gift—the gift of His Son, Jesus.

And when you receive those symbols, when you say “Yes” to God’s good gift of Jesus, I want to invite you in a time of personal prayer to also say “Yes” to our Father in heaven’s other primary good gift. Who is that other primary good gift? The Holy Spirit. As you receive the symbols of the bread and the wine, and as you say “Yes” to Jesus, I want to invite you in a time of personal prayer to also say “Yes” to the good gift of the Holy Spirit.

In preparation for this special service, I want us to pray a prayer of confession. When Jesus washed His disciples feet in preparation for this sacred service of communion, He was reminding them of the cleansing that He offers. Forgiveness and cleansing from sin. So I invite you to take some personal time now to confess your sins and ask Jesus to forgive you and make you clean. Then I’m going to pray a special over our lives and over these symbols of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus, and pray for a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives and in our midst as we receive God’s good gifts.

Our Father in Heaven, Thank you that You loved the world so much that You gave Your only begotten Son to save us from our sin. Please bless these symbols of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus, and thank you for saving us from our sin. Thank you that you forgive us and cleanse us from every sin that we may receive these symbols with joy and peace in our hearts. And thank you that we can also say “Yes” to the gift of the Holy Spirit to be with us and in us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

And now, I invite you to receive the good gifts that your Father in heaven has for you!

(Share in the communion service together).

Remember that Scripture song that I learned as a young Christian? Ask and it shall be given to you..... I found out later that the composer of that Scripture song, Karen Lafferty, had grown up in a Christian family, but in her teens and college years she had drifted away from Jesus. She was actually working in a nightclub in New Orleans not long before she wrote this song. But thank God, a friend came to her, and invited her to walk with Jesus again. A friend came to her and invited her to receive God's good gifts. And today, 35 years later, Karen is still walking with Jesus. And I say, Hallelujah! What do you say?

I'm thankful that you took the opportunity to receive God's good gifts today. And as we close this sacred service, I invite you to sing again the invitation of Jesus found in His great sermon on the mount:

Ask, and it shall be given unto you

Seek, and ye shall find

Knock and it shall be opened unto you, Allelu, allelujah!

Walking with Jesus - Part 10
The Golden Rule
Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: Matt 7:12
Subject: How should you treat others
Complements: the way that you would like to be treated.
Exegetical idea: You should treat others the way that you would like to be treated.
Homiletical idea: **Treat others the way that you would like to be treated!**
Purpose: To encourage my hearers to actively do good in their interactions with other, treating others the way that they would like to be treated.

Introduction

My wife has an interesting family history, especially on the Chinese side of her family. Her Chinese grandfather was an opium smuggler when he was a little boy. My wife's Chinese grandmother on the other hand, was the daughter of a physician to the Emperor of China. How they met is another story!

Grandma grew up in a Christian family, though they had originally been Moslems. They had a simple rule for life that guided them: Love God, work hard, and get as much education as you can. That simple rule blessed their lives and has blessed future generations. Love God, work hard, and get as much education as you can. My wife and I also follow that simple rule for our family rule.

Jesus also gave a simple rule for life in His Sermon on the Mount. If we live in harmony with that rule our lives will be blessed, our families will be blessed, and our world will be blessed. This rule that Jesus shared in His Sermon on the Mount is not the only principle that Jesus gave to guide our lives, but it is certainly an important one. In fact, this rule of Jesus does away with the need for hundreds of other more specific rules about our relationships with others.

Perhaps that is why some have referred to rule of Jesus as The Golden Rule. We are going to study this Golden Rule today as we continue our series on Walking with Jesus.

If you have your copy of the great sermon of Jesus, turn to Matthew 7:12. Let's read this Golden Rule of Jesus: "....." The way that I memorized the Golden Rule of Jesus, it sounded like this: **Do unto others what you would have them to do unto you.** Is that how you learned it? **Do unto others what you would have them to do unto you.**

This Golden Rule of Jesus has been misunderstood by many. I remember one occasion when our two sons were little, and they were having a heated disagreement. Christopher got upset and pushed his younger brother. Jonathan responded with a similar act of aggression, while at the same time quoting, or should I say misquoting this Bible verse from Matthew 7:12: "Do unto others!" I needed to have a little conversation with my boys! I explained to them that Jesus didn't say "Do unto others what they **do** to you!" Jesus said, "Do to others what you would have them do to you." At least at that time in their lives, our two boys misunderstood the Golden Rule of Jesus!

Others besides my two young sons have misunderstood the Golden Rule of Jesus. Some have viewed this rule of Jesus from a negative perspective. In other words, when they hear the Golden Rule of Jesus they think "Don't do mean things to other people if you don't want them to do mean things to you."

Now that's not a bad principle for life. In fact, many great teachers have shared a similar principle with their students:

Rabbi Hillel, a Jewish Rabbi in the generation just before the life and ministry of Jesus said: "What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor; that is the whole Torah, while the

rest is commentary thereon.”

-Confucius, (551-479) at the end of the 6th century BC and the beginning of the 5th century BC taught his students: “Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself.” Doctrine of the Mean, Xiii, pp. 3-4

-Mahavira, a contemporary of Confucius living in India, shared a similar rule: “Refrain from afflicting upon others such injury as would appear undesirable to us if inflicted upon ourselves.” Sayings of Lord Mahavira, p. 6.

That’s not a bad rule for life. Not a bad life principle to guide your behavior. But we misunderstand if we think that this negative rule captures the full meaning of the Rule of Jesus—the Golden Rule.

Let’s look at the words of Jesus again, recorded in Matthew 7:12. “.....” Notice the clear difference between this rule of Jesus and the rules that I just quoted from Hillel, Confucius and Mahavira. The rule of Jesus is positive. Active. Don’t just refrain from negative conduct. Rather, actively do good! Treat others the way that you would like to be treated.

Jesus tell us that this simple principle to guide our interaction with others “is the Law and the Prophets.” In other words, the Hebrew Scriptures, the Word of God that was available to the people of God at that time, testifies to the truth of this life principle.

Can you think of anywhere in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament, that confirms this Golden Rule of Jesus: Do to others what you would have them do to you? Certainly, there is the Word of the LORD in Leviticus 19:18, which is later quoted by Jesus: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Isn’t that how we really want to be treated? We want to be loved. To be cherished. To be treated with respect and care.

Jesus says, “Do to others what you want them to do to you.” In another place, Jesus says, “Love one another.” That’s really another statement of the same rule, isn’t it? Demonstrate love in the way that you relate to each other. Don’t just avoid doing bad things to each other. That’s important, but walking with Jesus involves more than just avoiding doing bad things. Rather, actively seek to do good. Treat each other the way that you want to be treated. Love each other. That’s a wonderful rule for life, isn’t it?

I like Eugene Peterson’s translation of these words of Jesus, found in the Message Bible. Listen: “Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for them. Add up God's Law and Prophets and this is what you get.”

That’s a great way of putting it in contemporary English, isn’t it? “Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for them. Add up God's Law and Prophets and this is what you get.”

Unfortunately, Eugene Peterson fails to translate one very important word that’s found in this saying of Jesus. It is seem like a minor omission, but actually this one word is very important if we are going to understand the Golden Rule of Jesus. What is that one word that Eugene Peterson failed to translate? It’s the one word that we haven’t yet considered in our study of this Golden Rule of Jesus, found in Matthew 7:12. What is the one word? **Therefore.**

The NIV translates use the word “So...” Someone once told me that whenever you see the word “therefore”, you should always ask what it’s there for?! Therefore is a conjunction. It joins what comes before with what comes after. “The tour bus is going to leave at 1:00 PM sharp. We are not going to be delayed for any reason. Therefore, you need to be on the bus and

in your seat by 12:55 PM at the latest!” Did you see how the “therefore” joined what came after with that which came before?

Do let’s go back to the great sermon of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount. In His Golden Rule, Jesus says, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Therefore, do to others what you want them to do to you. What is the “therefore” there for? Well, what has Jesus just been talking about?

Look at the beginning of Chapter 7, beginning with verse 1. “.....” Jesus begins this section of His great sermon by saying, “Don’t treat others like this!” Don’t judge. Jesus isn’t saying “Don’t use any common sense!” He isn’t saying, “Don’t use good judgment when making decisions.” We know that because just a few sentences later, Jesus says, in Matthew 7:6, “Don’t give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.” We need to use common sense in our interaction with others, especially those who have no appreciation for that which is holy, for that which is precious.

So Jesus isn’t saying, “Don’t use any common sense. Don’t use any judgment.” Rather Jesus is saying, “Don’t have a critical spirit!” “Don’t always think that it’s your job to correct people!” And then Jesus gives a humorous word picture! Listen to the words of Jesus, recorded in Matthew 7:3-5. “.....” I’m sure that those listening to Jesus there on the mountainside were chuckling! It’s a funny picture that Jesus paints. But it’s also sad. Because we see people who act like that.

Some people try to take a speck out of someone else’s eye while having a huge plank, a huge log in their own eye! And that huge plank, that log, that obscures their vision is that

critical, condemning spirit. Jesus says, “Don’t act like that!” Why not? Because that kind of behavior doesn’t reflect the beautiful character of our loving Father in heaven.

And what does the character of our loving Father in heaven look like? Well, we studied Matthew 7:7-11 last week. Our loving Father in heaven is generous and kind.

“.....” And what did we discover to be the primary good gifts that our loving heavenly Father longs to give to us? Do you remember from last week’s study? The gift of His own Son, Jesus. What did Jesus say in John 3:16? “God so loved the world that He gave....” What did our loving Father in heaven give? He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life?

And with the gift of Jesus, received by faith, comes salvation. With the gift of Jesus comes forgiveness and cleansing. With the gift of Jesus comes citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. There is no greater gift from our loving Father in heaven than the gift of Jesus.

And what did we learn is the secondary primary good gift that our loving Father in heaven longs to give to us? The gift of the Holy Spirit, to be with us and in us. How do we know that? Jesus told us, in Luke 11:13. “.....”

Our loving Father in heaven is pouring out His love to us. He is emptying heaven for us in the giving of His own Son and the giving of His Holy Spirit. Ask, seek, knock for these good gifts! I pray that someone here today, that someone joining us on our web church or via radio or television, I’m praying that you would decide to say “Yes” to our loving Father in heaven’s good gifts today! Say “Yes” to Jesus today. Say “Yes” to the Holy Spirit today.

“If you, then,” Jesus says, “being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” And

then comes the Golden Rule—therefore....in the light of the amazing love that your heavenly Father has poured out for you, therefore.... Do you see the connection? **Therefore.**

We don't just actively seek to do good to each other, to treat each other the way that we would like to be treated, because it's the right thing to do. It is the right thing to do, but that is not our motivation. We live by the Golden Rule of Jesus because that's how our loving Father in heaven has related to us. Our loving Father in heaven has treated us not as we deserve, but how He would like to be treated if He were in our situation. Our loving Father in heaven has treated us with grace, with mercy, with love. Bless His holy name.

Now go, He says, and live like that!

When Jesus met in woman caught in the very act of adultery, He didn't stone her. He didn't humiliate her publically, like the religious leaders were doing. Jesus practiced the Golden Rule. He treated her the way He would like to have been treated...with grace and mercy and love. "Neither do I condemn you," Jesus said to her. "Go and sin no more."

After Simon Peter had publically denied with curses that he even knew Jesus, the Savior didn't reject him. Jesus did have a private conversation with Simon Peter after Jesus was raised from the dead. That conversation was so private that it is not even recorded in the Scriptures. Our Savior is merciful, isn't He? And then publically, Jesus reinstated Peter and said, "Feed my sheep." Jesus practiced the Golden Rule with Peter. He treated Peter the way that He would like to have been treated, with grace and mercy and love.

I remember hearing the story of a young man who came to church for the worship service. This young man didn't dress like everyone else. He didn't smell like everyone else. He actually looked like he'd had some hard days, and hard nights. When he arrived at church, the

sanctuary was full. We know what that feels like here at Forest Lake Church, especially at 3rd service. There wasn't a seat available, at least not that this young man could see. So he walked up quietly up to the front and sat down on the carpet. He seemed quite interested in the message that the preacher was sharing from the Word of God. That's when an elderly gentleman came walking up to the front from the back of the church. The church members recognized him. He was a long time church member. This elderly gentleman walked right up to where the young man was sitting on the carpet, sat down next to him, shook his hand, and whispered, "I'm glad you came to church!" That, my friends, is living the Golden Rule! That is treating someone the way that you would like to be treated...with grace and mercy and love.

When I heard that story, I began to wince as I pictured that elderly gentleman walking up to the front. You know what I was thinking, don't you? It's sad, but I was expecting that elderly church member to criticize that young man for not being dressed right, or not smelling right, or not sitting in the right place. But that grey haired church member was walking with Jesus. He knew how much grace and mercy and love had been shown to him. And He was walking with Jesus. He treated that young man the way that he would want to have been treated!

So when you see someone come to church who is struggling in his marriage, don't just bash him over the head for being such a terrible husband and father. It's true that he may have made some mistakes, but he doesn't need you to judge him, to criticize him, to make him feel bad. Practice the Golden Rule of Jesus. Treat that brother how YOU would like to be treated! Treat that brother with the grace and mercy and love that your loving Father in heaven has shown to you. Practice the Golden Rule. Go and live like that!

Our son and daughter in law will be finishing dental school in a few weeks and moving to

Dallas, Texas. I found the closest church to where they are going to be living and I called the pastor. I told him what it meant for me that my children could find a church home where they could continue to feel loved and welcomed, a church where they could grow spiritually and walk with Jesus. Our son and daughter in law visited that church a few weeks ago, and my son called me to tell me what had happened. I held my breath as I listened to his report! “Dad,” he said, “we’ve never felt more welcomed in our whole lives!” And I said, “Praise the Lord! Thank you, Jesus.” Those people in Texas were living by the Golden Rule!

I pray that we could have the same report when people visit our church family, don’t you? “I’ve have never felt more welcomed in my whole life!” I try to shake some hands. But I can’t shake everyone’s hand. I try to invite some people to lunch. But I can’t have all of you over, especially with my wife out of town! You’d be cooking for me! We need to work as a team. We all need to live the Golden Rule of Jesus: Treat others the way that we want to be treated! Love others, just as our loving Father in heaven has shown love to us.

Go, and live like that! And when people ask you why you are so generous, when people ask you why you are so kind, when people ask you why you are so loving, you tell them that you are not trying to work your way to heaven. You are already a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. You tell them how good your loving Father in heaven has been to you, and that, by His grace, you are reflecting the beauty of His character to others. That’s what Jesus did when He walked on this earth. And you are walking with Jesus! So, go and live like that!

Walking with Jesus - Part 11
The Narrow Gate
Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: Matt 7:13-23
Subject: What happens when you know Jesus as your personal Savior
Complements: you have eternal life.
Exegetical idea: When you know Jesus as your personal Savior you have eternal life.
Homiletical idea: **Enter in the narrow gate!**
Purpose: To encourage my hearers receive Jesus.

Introduction

Have you ever tried to imagine what it will be like when you finally meet Jesus face to face? For many of us, that picture generates many positive thoughts and feelings. Finally, meeting Jesus face to face! Amazing! But now try to imagine how a person would feel if Jesus said, ““I never knew you. Depart from Me...”

What a terrible thought! To hear Jesus saying, “I never knew you. Depart from Me...” It makes me shudder. And yet, according to Jesus, some people will actually hear those words. Who are those people, and how can we avoid their fatal mistake?

We’ll find the answers to those questions in our study today of the Sermon on the Mount. We have been studying this great sermon of Jesus for the past 10 weeks, and now, near the close of His sermon, Jesus makes an earnest appeal and gives a solemn warning.

We are going to begin our study today in Matthew 7:21-23. Please take your copy of this great sermon of Jesus and find Matthew 7, beginning with verse 21. Let’s read out loud together.

“.....”

Jesus is addressing religious leaders. These people prophesied in Jesus’ name, cast out demons in Jesus’ name, and did many other wonderful works in Jesus name. But Jesus says, “I

never knew you. Depart from Me....” “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus might have added, “Not everyone who prophesies, or casts out demons or does marvelous works shall enter the kingdom of heaven.” Who then shall enter? Jesus answers that question in Matthew 7:21b “.....”

Now hear is the crucial question. What is Jesus referring to here? What is “the will of my Father in heaven?” Be careful before you jump to any conclusions! I have heard a myriad of answers to that question. What is the will of my Father in heaven that we must do if we would enter the kingdom of heaven? Write these texts down: John 6:40; Matthew 18:14.

“.....” The will of our loving Father in heaven believe in Jesus, receive Him as our Savior and are saved and have eternal life. Jesus doesn’t want to have to come to you and say, “I never knew you. Depart from Me....”

That is why Jesus gives the solemn appeal as He draws to the close of His great sermon. We can read that solemn appeal in Matthew 7:13. “.....” I learned something new this week as I studied this passage. The Greek word translated “gate” here in Matthew 7:13 is typically used for a large entrance to a city or edifice. It’s actually a startling statement. Because Jesus says, “Enter by the narrow main entrance.” This is not a side door. This is the main entrance. In fact, Jesus clearly teaches that this is the only entrance.

Why does Jesus use the expression “narrow gate?” Why doesn’t He just speak of a beautiful gate or a glorious gate? Why is this main entrance narrow? The KJV speaks of a “strait” gate. The Greek word used here, “narrow” or “strait”, is only used 3 times in the NT, all when describing this gate that we must enter. Jesus restates this teaching in Luke 13:24. There Jesus uses the Greek word for a common door, but He uses the same adjective to describe

that door. It is NARROW. There has to be some significance to using that word to describe the gate: the NARROW gate.

What is this narrow gate? Where is it located? Or should I ask, “Who is this narrow gate through whom we must enter the kingdom of heaven? Several words of Jesus come to mind. In John 10:9, Jesus says, “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved. And in John 14:6, Jesus says, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except by Me.”

Jesus is the narrow gate. Let me ask you a question. Is it easy or difficult to enter this narrow main entrance? What is the answer? Is it easy or hard? The answer is both. Jesus tells us in Matthew 11:28-30, “.....” That sounds easy. But Jesus also says in Luke 13:24, “.....” The NIV says, “Make every effort.” But I think that the verb is more intense than that. It’s the Greek verb ἀγωνίζομαι, from which we get our English word “agonize.” Agonize to enter in the narrow gate.

What it is about entering this narrow gate that is hard? Any ideas. I want to suggest that you have to leave some things behind when you enter the narrow gate. You can’t bring all of your baggage with you. You have to leave your cherished sins behind. That doesn’t mean that you’ll never sin again. But you don’t keep embracing those cherished sins when you enter the narrow gate. You have to leave your self-righteousness behind when you enter the narrow gate. You have to leave you self-sufficiency behind. You have to leave your arrogance and your pride behind. The gate is narrow.

And Jesus says that once you enter through the narrow main entrance, the way is “difficult”, “compressed” or “confined.” This word can also have the meaning of being

oppressed, or troubled. How are we oppressed, troubled or persecuted on the way that leads to life?

I can still remember the testimony of a young lady in Allentown, Pennsylvania who had just decided to follow Jesus. She had just decided to enter in the narrow main entrance. And she was amazed at what happened. When she was living for the devil, abusing her body, staying out all night, her parents didn't say a word. But once she decided to follow Jesus, her parents were all stressed out. They told her that she was becoming a fanatic. She couldn't understand it. She was going to hell and nobody cared. As soon as she decided to enter in the narrow gate and walk the way that leads to life, she started experiencing difficulties, trouble, oppression, persecution.

And Jesus warns us that some of the difficulty will come from people who appear to be followers of Jesus. Listen to his words in Matthew 7:15. "....." Didn't Jesus warn us about possible persecution at the beginning of His sermon? What did Jesus tell us in Matthew 5:10-12. "....." Listen also to the words of Jesus recorded in John 16:1-4. "....."

These people who want to kill you are also religious. They believe that persecuting you is offering service to God. But actually, they are not connected to God at all. They are not walking with Jesus at all. They are wolves in sheep's clothing. And when you decide to enter in the narrow gate and walk on the way that leads to life, you'll meet some of those wolves in sheep's clothing.

No wonder that some people get discouraged with church. There are some ravenous wolves in the flock, dressed up to look like sheep. These ravenous wolves have not entered in through the narrow gate. They have not surrendered to Jesus as their personal Savior. They

appear to be walking with Jesus, but actually they are in rebellion. They are wolves in sheep's clothing.

How will you be able to identify these ravenous wolves? Jesus says, "You will know them by their fruits." Now, let me remind you that fruits are not always immediately apparent. Sometimes you have to wait for a while to see what fruit a life is producing. But when the fruit appears, you will know whether someone is a good tree or a bad tree.

Because you can't always tell for sure, at least at first, whether a person is a good tree or a bad tree, it's best not to look to people for your example. People can disappoint you. People can let you down. Scripture says that we ought to look to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith!" We ought to enter in through the narrow gate, and keep on fixing our eyes on Jesus.

So I have a simple question for you. Are you one of those who has done the will of our Father in heaven? He is not willing that any should perish. He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. His will for you is this: that you respond to His gift of love by receiving Jesus as your personal Savior and having eternal life through faith in Him!

When I met Nathan, He was just beginning to learn about Jesus. His mother died of cancer two days before his 17th birthday. For several years, he'd been running wild. He had searched for truth in eastern religions, secular humanism, and martial arts. He had been taught to learn from the masters but be subject to none.

When Nathan heard about Jesus, he realized that Jesus didn't give him the option to take one of many roads to the kingdom of heaven. There is only one way. And Jesus didn't give him room to bring all of his baggage with him. The gate is narrow.

Nathan walked away from E.S.T., he walked away from his martial arts master, who used to cut fruit on Nathan's abdomen with a sword, he walked away from his substance abuse, and he surrendered his life completely to Jesus! Even though most of his friends didn't understand what was happening to him, Nathan was not ashamed to give his testimony, even if it meant suffering, trouble, and persecution. Nathan invited more than 100 people to his baptism. He was baptized outside, in a pool, because most of his friends had never been in church!

Fourteen months after his baptism, Nathan left his job at a foundry and went to college to study more of God's Word. Today, Nathan is a pastor in the Seventh-day Adventist church. He is still walking on the way that leads to life. He has experienced some trouble, some oppression, some persecution. But as the apostle Paul declares, "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." 2 Cor 4:17-18

And I have no doubt that on the day when Nathan meets Jesus face to face, the Savior will not say to him, "I never knew you. Depart from Me..." Rather, Jesus will say, "Come, you blessed on my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you." It is the same kingdom that Jesus spoke about at the beginning of His Sermon on the Mount when He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for there is the kingdom of heaven."

Blessed are those who recognize that they need a Savior. Blessed are those who recognize that God so loved the world..... Blessed are those who receive Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord. Blessed are those who enter in through the narrow gate. Even those the way may be difficult. Even though those who walk with Jesus may suffer trouble, oppression and persecution, that way leads to life!

In fact, that way not only leads to life in the future! That way leads to life now! Eternal

life is already yours once you have entered in the narrow gate. Eternal life is already yours as you walk with Jesus on the way. That was the testimony of the apostle John at the close of his first letter. His testimony is recorded in 1 John 5:11-13. “.....”

And so my appeal to you today is a simple one. And an earnest one. I appeal to you to enter in the narrow gate. I appeal to you to receive Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord. I don't want him to say to you, “I never knew you. Depart from Me...”

And if you have already entered the narrow gate, and you are experiencing some challenges along the way, I encourage you not to get discouraged. You are on the road that leads to life. And that life is already yours through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So press on. Keep walking with Jesus! Keep looking to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith. Keep knowing Him, whom to know is life eternal. And then share what you know with others. Tell them about Jesus. Tell them about His appeal to enter the narrow gate and walk on the way that leads to life.

Is there someone here today who needs to enter in the narrow gate? Is there someone here today, either on campus, or joining us via our media ministries and you need to receive Jesus today as your personal Savior and Lord? I appeal to you to say “Yes” to Jesus today. He doesn't want to say to you, “I never knew you. Depart from Me...” He wants to say to you, “Come, you blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you!”

You'll notice that there is a white response card in the pew rack in front of you. On the reverse side, it says prayer request. Can you find one of those cards right now? If you want to make a decision today to receive Jesus and enter in the narrow gate, I wish you would write that down as a prayer request. If you want us to pray for someone you love who needs to enter in the

narrow gate, someone who needs to know the love of Jesus and be saved, I wish you would write that person's name down so that we can pray for him, pray for her. And if you would like to be part of this church family that teaches the Word of God and leads people to Jesus, you can write that too. Then just put your name and contact information on the reverse side and give it to me, or one of the other pastors, elders or deacons after the service. Or you can leave it at the welcome desk. We want to pray for you and thank God for a decision that you made today.

I will always be grateful that I had the privilege to invite Nathan to enter the narrow gate. On the day when our Lord Jesus returns in glory, and the dead in Christ shall rise from their sleep, Nathan's mother is going to have a wonderful surprise. Her wild teenage son not only choose to become a follower of Jesus! He has also devoted his life to encourage others to enter in the narrow gate and walk on the way that leads to life!

I can only imagine what it will be like, when I walk by Your side...
I can only imagine, what my eyes will see, when Your Face is before me!

I can only imagine. I can only imagine.
Surrounded by Your Glory, what will my heart feel?
Will I dance for you, Jesus? Or in awe of You, be still?
Will I stand in Your presence, or to my knees will I fall?
Will I sing 'Hallelujah!?' Will I be able to speak at all?
I can only imagine! I can only imagine!

I can only imagine, when that day comes, when I find myself standing in the Son!
I can only imagine, when all I will do, is forever, forever worship You!

I can only imagine! I can only imagine!
Surrounded by Your Glory, what will my heart feel?
Will I dance for you, Jesus? Or in awe of You, be still?

Will I stand in Your presence, or to my knees will I fall?
Will I sing 'Hallelujah!?' Will I be able to speak at all?
I can only imagine! Yeah! I can only imagine!

Surrounded by Your Glory, what will my heart feel?
Will I dance for you, Jesus? Or in awe of You, be still?
Will I stand in Your presence, or to my knees will I fall?
Will I sing 'Hallelujah!?' Will I be able to speak at all?

I can only imagine! Yeah! I can only imagine!
I can only imagine! Yeah! I can only imagine!! Only imagine!!!

I can only imagine.
I can only imagine, when all I do is forever, forever worship You!
I can only imagine."

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WALKING WITH JESUS – PART 12

Building on the Rock

Dr. Derek Morris

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Preaching passage: | Matthew 7:24-27 |
| Subject: | How Jesus described those who heard his teaching |
| Complements: | If they did what they heard they were wise If they did not do what they heard they were foolish |
| Exegetical idea: | Jesus described those who heard his teaching and did what they heard as wise and those who did not do what they heard as foolish |
| Homiletical idea: | Build on the Rock. |
| Purpose: | To encourage my hearers to be wise and build their lives on Jesus. |

Introduction

When Jesus finished his great Sermon on the Mount, the people were amazed! They had never heard anyone preach like that before! Jesus spoke with authority! He was connected with heaven and He taught simple truths that everyone could understand. But more than that, Jesus called for people to act on what they heard. He called them to make a life commitment. He called them to live differently as a result of hearing His sermon.

Last week, I gave an invitation for people to make a decision to enter by the narrow gate. If you heard last week's message, you understand what that meant. Who is the narrow gate? Jesus. What is the will of our Father in heaven? That we believe in Jesus and have eternal life. Is it easy or hard to enter in that narrow gate? Both. Easy, if you come just as you are. Hard if you try to carry all of your baggage with you: your cherished sins and your arrogance and self-righteousness. Jesus said, "Many will try to enter the narrow gate but will not be able to enter in." That's why we need to strive to enter. The verb was αγωνιζομαι. Agonize to enter in. Strive to enter in the narrow gate. Don't let anyone or anything hold you back. That is the way that leads to life!

Several people came up to me after the sermon and handed me response cards. Here are just a few of them. “.....” Someone ought to say “Amen!” out there. Angels sing when people enter in the narrow gate. Angels sing when someone decided to come home to their loving Father in heaven!

We’ve been studying the great Sermon on the Mount together in this series entitled Walking with Jesus. Today, we consider the close of Jesus’ sermon. Jesus just tells a story and imbedded in that story is a powerful appeal.

The story that Jesus told at the end of His great sermon on the mount is probably one of His best-known stories. Children sing a song about this story of Jesus. It goes like this. If you know it, sing along with me: “The wise man built his house upon the rock....”

It is a familiar story to many. But I want us to examine that story more carefully today. So take your copy of the great sermon of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount, and let’s start reading from Matthew 7:24. As we read together, listen carefully for similarities and differences.

“.....”

Did you notice some similarities and differences in the story of the two builders? One similarity is that both groups represented by these two builders heard the words of Jesus. To both groups Jesus says “Whoever hears these words of mine.” Jesus is not just talking about His previous sentence. Jesus is referring to the entire contents of His sermon--everything that they had heard. Both builders were represented in the crowd that day. And they had this in common: they had both heard the words of Jesus. And we have also heard the words of Jesus as we have studied this great Sermon on the Mount.

There is a second similarity between the two builders. They both build a house. Now building a house is not accomplished without effort, whether you're talking about a building or a life. It takes effort of one kind or another to build a house. Both verbs are active. The wise man builds his house. The foolish man builds his house. No one built it for them. It doesn't say, "The wise man had his house built. Or the foolish man had his house built." It doesn't tell us whether the houses were well built or poorly built. But the two builders had this in common. They both build a house. We sense that Jesus is talking about more than constructing a building. Jesus is talking about building a life. And both individuals build a house.

There's a third similarity between the two builders. They both have heard the words of Jesus. They both build a house. What else do these two builders have in common? Thirdly, they both experience a time of crisis. Read Matthew 7:25 with me. Just the first part of the verse. "....." Now read Matthew 7:27. Again, we'll just read the first part of the verse. "....." That sounds similar doesn't it? Both builders experienced a time of crisis.

So in this story that Jesus tells at the end of His great Sermon on the Mount, there are three similarities between the two builders. They both have heard the words of Jesus. They both build a house. They both experience a time of crisis. And we can relate to their experience too. We have all gone through our own times of crisis, haven't we? And if we haven't experienced any crisis, we know someone who has. Isn't that the truth?

So we have noticed three similarities in the story that Jesus tells of the two builders. Now let's turn our attention to the differences between the two builders in the story. Before Jesus tells us anything about what these two builders do, He describes them. One is wise. The other is foolish. This is the first difference between the two builders. The word "wise" used in this story

literally means “thoughtful.” It’s not talking about a person with a high IQ, or a person who is highly educated. “Oh that person is wise!” No. This word means thoughtful. This builder is thinking about what he is doing.

The other builder is described as *foolish*. At least, that is how the translators of the NKJV translate the Greek word. Other translators use words like “stupid”. You might be interested to know that the Greek word used here is $\mu\omega\rho\omicron\varsigma$, related to $\mu\omega\rho\omicron\nu$, from which we get our English word “moron.” That’s strong language, isn’t it? Again, may I remind you that Jesus isn’t talking about the person’s IQ. He’s not talking about how educated this person is. The first builder is wise, thoughtful, because he hears the words of Jesus and does them. The second builder is foolish, he is a moron, because he hears the words of Jesus and does not do them.

Someone might say, “Jesus is rather arrogant saying that, isn’t He?” “Who does Jesus think He is?” The answer is simple and bold. Jesus not only thinks, He knows that He is the Messiah, He is the Door, He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. To hear His words and do them is wise. To hear His words and not do them is foolish. And that’s the first difference between the two builders in the story that Jesus tells at the end of His great sermon on the mount.

But I want you to notice a second difference between the two builders in this story of Jesus. This second difference could be easily missed if you just quickly read over the story. Do you remember that both builders had this in common: they both experienced a time of crisis. But a careful reading of the text reveals that the intensity of the crisis is different for the two builders. Go back with me to Matthew 7:25 (first part). Speaking about the experience of the wise builder, Jesus says, “.....” Now, speaking about the experience of the foolish builder, in Matthew 7:27 (first part) Jesus says, “.....” You say, “Pastor, those two

phrases are exactly the same in my copy of the sermon of Jesus! And you are correct, if you are talking about the words that the translators of the NKJV used. But there is one significant difference in the Greek. The word translated “beat” on that house in Matthew 7:27 is a different Greek word from the “beat” on that house used in Matthew 7:25. Is that significant? I think so. Jesus could have easily used the identical word. Everything else in that phrase is the same. But the Greek words translated “beat” in Matthew 7:25 and Matthew 7:27 are different.

In both situations, the rains descended and the floods came and the winds blew. The word for “flood” is ποταμος, which is also used to describe a “river.” That’s the word from which we get our English word hippopotamus, river horse. So in both situations the rains descend and the flood comes. Not just a some puddles on the ground, but a river. Perhaps even a raging torrent.

But I want you to notice that this time of crisis is different for the two builders. For the wise builder, the thoughtful builder, the floods and the wind literally “fall upon” his house. Or fall towards his house. It’s a serious situation, but that builder wisely built not just on a rock, but on the rock. The use of the definite article suggests a rock ledge. A rock outcropping. Not just a little rock laying around on the ground. This builder has chosen the higher ground. Are you listening to me today? This wise builder has chosen the higher ground. He built his house upon the rock. And when the time of crisis comes, the floods and the wind “fall upon” his house.

But when the time of crisis comes for the foolish builder, the floods and the wind literally “beat upon his house.” The foolish builder built on sand. In other words, he built in a dried out riverbed. He carelessly built his house in the direct path of trouble. And when the floods came

and the winds blew, his house was in the direct path of the raging torrent. The floods and the winds “beat upon” his house.

Now, I just want to pause for a moment and remind you of an important truth. When you decide to follow Jesus, when you decide to enter by the narrow gate and walk on the way that leads to life, you will still have times of crisis. You will still have times of trouble. Jesus told us that the way is difficult. Sometimes you will experience trouble, oppression, persecution. We learned about that last week. But those times of trouble will impact you differently if you are built upon the Rock. When you stand by the bedside of a dying loved one, it’s still a time of storm, but you have a shelter in the time of storm. When you go through a financial crisis, it’s still a time of storm, but you know that your treasures are laid up in heaven. You have a shelter in the time of storm. We all will face times of crisis in our lives, but the storm will affect you differently when you are built upon the Rock.

So far, we have observed two differences between the two builders in the story that Jesus told at the end of His sermon on the mount. The first difference is that one is wise, thoughtful, and the other is foolish, literally a “moron.” One does what he has heard from the teachings of Jesus and the other does not do what he has heard. Secondly, the intensity of the time of crisis is different for the two builders. They both face a time of crisis, but the intensity is different because the wise man built on the Rock, on higher ground, while the foolish man built on the sand, in the direct path of the raging torrent.

But there’s a third difference between the two builders in the story that Jesus told at the end of His great Sermon on the Mount. And this difference is the most obvious. The final outcome is different for the two builders. For the wise builder, the thoughtful builder, his house

did not fall. Why? Because it was so well constructed? No. His house did not fall because it was founded on the Rock. An unbeliever might scoff when a believer is killed by a drunk driver. “It didn’t help him to believe in Jesus!” But what that unbeliever doesn’t understand is this: even though that believer was killed, even though that believer now sleeps in Jesus, his house did not fall. He is founded on the Rock. And the promise of Jesus will be fulfilled: “This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life and I will raise Him up at the last day.” That believer’s house will stand! Why? Because he built on the Rock!

Conversely, the foolish builder’s house will fall. Read again with me from Matthew 7:27. “.....” Did you notice that the foolish man’s house doesn’t just fall? It is a great fall. The word is *μεγαλη*--a mega fall. A total collapse. A complete demolition. The message is clear: when the house is not built on the Rock, that house will not stand. It will fall, and its fall will be great.

When we teach our children to sing “The wise man built his house upon the rock...” we also need to teach them what that means. We need to teach our children that building a house on the rock means building our lives on Jesus. Building our house on the rock means listening to Jesus and doing what He says. And His most important appeal to us, the will of our Father in heaven, is that we would enter by the narrow gate, we would believe in Jesus and have eternal life with Him.

One of the first preachers that I heard when I came to America as a young man was a preacher named Ron Halvorsen. I had never heard anyone preach like that before! And I haven’t heard many preach like that since! Ron Halvorsen shared his testimony, From Gangs to

God. Ron grew up in Brooklyn, New York. He fought in a gang. He saw violence on the streets. One day, Ron decided to skip school at his vocational high school. But he had a problem. Where could he go where the truant officer wouldn't find him? Then he had a great idea. He would go to a Christian school, Greater New York Academy, and visit a friend from his neighborhood. Ron convinced another friend, Ritchie, to skip school and go with him. Ron arrived at Greater New York Academy wearing his leather jacket, a cigarette dangling between his lips, and a switchblade in his right-hand pocket. That week the students were having a week of prayer. Ron was shocked. A week of prayer! He didn't even pray for a few minutes and they were having a week of prayer! Ron and his friend Ritchie slipped in to the back row of the chapel and tried to look cool. The preacher was a man named Pastor Keymer. He was talking about Jesus. They heard that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

At the end of that week, Ron and his friend Ritchie skipped school again and came back to Greater New York Academy. That day, the preacher gave an invitation for students to accept Jesus as their personal Savior. He invited them to enter by the narrow gate and walk on the way that leads to life. Ron felt conviction in his heart. He had lived a life of fighting. A life of crime. A life of sin. But Ron sensed the calling of the Holy Spirit to be born again, to make a choice to build a whole new life on the Rock, Jesus Christ.

Ron stood to his feet, turned to his friend Ritchie and said, "Why don't you give your heart to Christ too?" "No, Ronnie, I can't" Ritchie said. "There's just too much too it!" Ritchie stayed in his seat that day. He chose not to enter by the narrow gate. He chose not to accept

Jesus as His personal Savior. He chose not to build his house on the Rock. “There’s just too much to it,” Ritchie said.

Ron entered the narrow gate that day. He chose to build his house on the Rock. He went on to become a preacher of the Gospel! He has walked on the way that leads to life for the past 50 years. Thousands of people have learned about Jesus as a result of Ron’s testimony. Both of Ron’s children are preachers! Ron never regrets his decision to enter in by the narrow gate. He never regrets his decision to build his house upon the Rock.

Ritchie chose to build his house on sand. He ended up in prison, serving a life sentence for murder. He built his house on sand, and his house fell. And great was its fall.

And so Jesus concludes His great Sermon on the Mount with an appeal. No organ is playing. No song is sung. He just tells a story, about two builders. And the appeal is clear: Build on the Rock. Build on the Rock. Build on the Rock.

Wherever you are today, whether here on campus, or joining us via our media ministry, I appeal to you today to build on the Rock.