

**BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED**

Matthew 5:10-12

— **Intro:** Today we come to the last of the Beatitudes. In fact, there are two Beatitudes which are mentioned in our text. I am taking them up together because they both have to do with *persecution*. It seems strange to all of us, I am sure, to combine the word “blessed” with the word “persecute” because the Bible shows, and the history of God’s dealings with His people from the very beginning down to the present hour, shows that times of persecution are usually times of suffering and unhappiness. But from these words of our Lord Jesus Himself we can actually say that those who are persecuted under the conditions described in these three verses are *twice-blessed*! This is what our text tells us. (Read verses 10 and 11.) If I can remind you again of the meaning of the word “blessed,” it means to be *happy*, or *supremely blessed*, or even *well off*. The Lord does not say that we should seek persecution, but indicates that it is not to be feared, but even to be anticipated as one of the many instruments, or experiences, which the Lord uses to bring us blessing. The order of the Beatitudes indicates that if we are manifesting the character of people who know the Lord, that persecution will come our way.

— But what does it mean *to be persecuted*?

It does not always mean *to kill*, although it has meant that countless numbers of times in the past. John MacArthur used the word *harass*. So the word has a wide range of meanings. When anyone troubles you, or mistreats you, or tries to make life uncomfortable to you, these all fall into the category of persecution. Persecution, to use a word we are all familiar with today, is a form of *abuse*. Those of us who know the Lord in present-day America have not had to suffer like Christians have in other parts of the world although even here it can become very severe at times.

Sometimes Christians are persecuted with words, but at other times it can become more violent

— There is another idea in the NT word for persecute which we need to understand, and that is it carries with it the idea of pursuing the one who is being persecuted. We have a good example of that when we see how reluctant Pharaoh was to let the children of Israel go out of Egypt. And then, when he finally let them go, and thought that they were trapped at the Red Sea, he went after them with his army for the purpose of bringing them back to Egypt to make them serve as slaves again. That was perse-

cution.

— The life of John the Baptist ended in his early thirties as a result of persecution. And tradition holds that all of the apostles were martyred – and it is very likely the truth.

The supreme example of persecution in the Bible was seen in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. His enemies pursued Him until they succeeded in having Him crucified.

We see it also in the life of the Apostle Paul. When Paul was in Thessalonica, the Jews persecuted him so severely that his fellow believers sent him away to Berea, fearing for his life. But then, when the Jews of Thessalonica heard that he was in Berea, they went to Berea. And this is what we read in Acts 17:13,

But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.

And so Paul had to leave Berea. But you see that the idea of pursuit was very obvious in what the Jews were doing.

— Paul expressed it this way in his second letter to the church at Corinth:

8 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

10 Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body (2 Cor. 4:8-10).

Persecution was such a common experience among the believers in both the OT and the NT, but especially in the NT, that most of the time suffering is mentioned in the Bible, it has to do with persecution.

But it still seems strange, doesn't it, for our Lord to put the words "blessed" and "persecuted" together. That is, it seems strange until we really examine all that He had to say about persecution in these three verses. But the fact that these verses come last in the Beatitudes, give them a special place of emphasis, and the fact that we have the word "blessed" used two times when our Lord was speaking of this subject, also gives special emphasis to what He was saying.

— So the first thing that we ought to notice about these verses is:

## **I. THE CERTAINTY OF PERSECUTION (Matt. 5:10-11).**

Notice especially in verse 11 that the Lord did not say, “*If* men shall revile you,” etc., but “when they shall revile you ...” And this will especially be true when we as the Lord’s people cultivate the spiritual characteristics that the Lord had just describe in the preceding Beatitudes.

And it seems to be especially strange to me when the Lord went from speaking about His people as “peacemakers” to saying what He did in these three verses we are considering today about being persecuted. You would think that the world would treasure the efforts of those who were true peacemakers, but that is just not the case. In fact, it would seem that the more godly a person seeks to be (and our Lord had been speaking in these Beatitudes about godliness), the more his actions are misrepresented, and the stronger the persecution.

The Apostle Paul told Timothy in 2 Tim. 3:12, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” As I have tried to explain, persecution for the people of God varies from time to time from minor difficulties to extreme persecution which can result in death. But for all of us who know the Lord, we must expect persecution. Even when people may not be bothering us, yet the Devil is relentless in his opposition of us, and he has many ways of making life miserable for us so as to discourage us.

We need always to remember those words of our Lord which He spoke to His disciples as they walked from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane. I am referring to the words found in John 15:18-19:

18 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

Hatred sometimes, as here, can mean simple rejection. Or it can be stronger opposition. But it is clear that the Lord did not build up the expectation of His disciples that life would be easy for them, or for any believer. We are engaged in a spiritual warfare, and we need to expect to be involved in battles.

But let us move on.

The second thing that I want you to notice about what our Lord said in

these verses is that:

## **II. THERE ARE THREE CAUSES FOR PERSECUTION WHICH APPLY TO WHAT HE SAID (Matt. 5:10-11).**

You know, sometimes we can bring trouble on ourselves by trying to do the right thing in the wrong way.

Take, e.g., the situation where we have a friend, or even some member of or family, who is not a Christian, and every time we are with that person we try to witness to them and to get them to trust the Lord. It is not to be unexpected if we find that they don't like to be around us. We need to speak to others about the Lord, but there comes a time when we have said all that we can say. That is when we need to spend more time praying, and talk about other things when we are with them. We need to show that we believe in the sovereignty of God, and that the Lord will use what we have said, and even use others if it is in His plan to save those we are burdened for.

Or let me give you another example. A few years ago I had a young man from another fellowship in my Tuesday Bible Class who was an activist. And he did everything he could to try to get me to go down to protest at the abortion clinic on Portland's west side. I don't know how many times he had been arrested, but he looked upon this as persecution. Actually what he did was illegal, and he brought the trouble upon himself. I am against abortions, but as long as it is illegal, it is wrong to block the entrance or to disrupt what they do in those places.

So we need to be very careful not to bring reproach upon ourselves as Christians, or what is worse, to bring reproach upon the name of our Lord. I am sure that many things were going on in the Roman government which were abominable in the Lord's sight, yet neither He nor His apostles after Him ever took a stand against the government, nor did they ever form a political party to oppose the government. They preached the Gospel, and spent much time in prayer. It is easy for us to seek good objectives in the wrong way, in our way, instead of God's way.

What did the Lord say were three legitimate reasons for expecting persecution from the world?

The first was:

**A. “For righteousness’ sake.”**

Do you remember what the Lord said in the fourth Beatitude? Look at it in verse 6. (Read.)

I pointed out several ideas that the Lord could, and probably did, have in mind when He pronounced a blessing on those who “do hunger and thirst after righteousness.” I will just refer to one here. *It meant having an intense desire to live a life that is pleasing to the Lord. It meant not just knowledge of what was pleasing to the Lord, but it meant the transformation of the life.*

To be “persecuted for righteousness’ sake,” expresses the world’s attitude toward godly living. The world doesn’t care about what is pleasing to God, and even being around people whose main concern is to please God, makes the people of the world very uncomfortable. And, read your Bible, and you will see that this is one of the main reasons for the world’s persecution of the Lord’s people. The people of the world resent anyone who doesn’t live like they do. This is what Rom. 12:2 teaches us.

So when we suffer persecution, or lose friends because we want to please God, this is a legitimate reason for experiencing the persecution that comes to us from the world.

Look with me at a second reason:

**B. When the world’s accusations against us are false.**

Notice the word “falsely” in verse 11.

The Apostle Peter wrote a good word for us along this line. You will find the first part in 1 Pet. 2:11-12:

11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

And then five verses later in the same chapter Peter said this to those who were servants:

18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.

19 For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

20 For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God (1 Pet. 2:18-20).

False accusations may come. They certainly did against the Lord. And the same was true of the Apostle Paul. But by God's grace let us make sure that the accusations are false. You can't clear all of them up, and so we need to do what Paul told the Roman believers to do. Listen to his words:

17 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:17-21).

So when false charges are laid against us, let us return good for evil, and trust the Lord to take care of the circumstances.

But perhaps the hardest kind of persecution that comes our way is:

### **C. Persecution “for my sake,” said the Lord (Matt. 5:11).**

The world has no place for the Lord Jesus Christ, either in their thoughts, and certainly not in their lives. We hear His holy Name used in blasphemy constantly. That is always hard to take. And when we tell people that there is only one way to heaven, and that is through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross, the world rebels, and we often, not always, but often, find ourselves being charged with bigotry.

Our main concern is to be the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. We stand for His Deity, His infinite perfection, His death and resurrection, and His coming again. We believe that the Word, both the Old and New Testaments, have Him as their theme – every book in the Bible! Much more could be said here, but let me move on.

The third point in our text that I want to make is this:

### III. WHAT ARE WE TO DO WHEN PERSECUTIONS COME?

Well, if we are twice-blessed, we should not be surprised that the Lord said, “Rejoice.” But this is not all that He said. He said, “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad.” This puts us in the same group with the prophets of the OT. What a company that is!

This strikes us as being rather strange, doesn't it? Should we rejoice when we are being persecuted? The answer is “yes.” And the reason is, not because we enjoy being in trouble, but because the Lord is accomplishing a work in our hearts through our troubles which cannot be accomplished in any other way. The Lord can keep all trouble from us, but the very fact that we have trials is one way the Lord has of continuing to make us more like Himself.

Persecutions and trials show us how weak we are, but the Apostle Paul told us that when we are weak, then we are strong. Troubles always show up our weaknesses, and our constant need of our Lord – our need to trust Him more than we do.

The Apostle Paul was given a thorn in the flesh. He tells us about this, and his reaction to it in 2 Cor. 12:7-10. Listen to his words:

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

There is much more that could be said along this line, but I trust that the Lord will impress all of us with the importance of what we have in these three verses.

Now I have always been able to conclude by speaking of the promises, and today is no exception. In fact, we don't have just one promise, but two. Notice what they are.

#### IV. TWO PROMISES (Matt. 5:10, 12).

##### A. "For their's is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:10).

We had this in the first Beatitude, and here we come to the same promise in the last Beatitudes. How very important it must be!

This is both a word of assurance as well as a word of testimony! To experience the blessing of the Lord in times of persecution is evidence that we really know the Lord. He does not leave us as victims of anyone, but actually makes us more than conquerors as He works all things together for His own glory and for our eternal good. But also when the world looks upon Christians under fire, and sees their faith in the Lord, and the peace that goes with their faith, this is often the testimony that the Spirit of God uses to draw others to the Lord Jesus Christ. To rejoice in tribulations and persecutions is not human! It is evidence of the sovereign grace of God! And such a testimony often wins a greater hearing for the Gospel than anything else possibly could!

But look at the second promise:

##### B. "For great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. 5:12).

The emphasis in the first promise is upon the present. The emphasis upon the second promise is upon the future, a certain future for every child of God. The Lord here, as in other places and on other occasions, was teaching His disciples (and also us), that we should seek for heavenly rewards. And that is one reason behind all godly living. We ought to seek crowns if for no other reason than that we would have something to lay at our Lord's feet in the glory. We all should seek to have our Lord say when we stand before Him, "Well done, good and faithful servant ... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25:21).

**Concl:** What is your particular trial or persecution today? And what is mine? Are we rejoicing in them, not because we enjoy being troubled, but because of what the Lord is doing in us through them, and because of the unique opportunity they give to us to make the Lord known to others.



It was 274 years ago, in 1724, that Isaac Watts penned the words of that great hymn which we often sing, "Am I a Soldier of the Cross?" It says what I believe the Lord was saying to us in these Beatitudes we have been considering today, and I want to read the hymn to you. It is #481 in our hymnal if you want to follow the words.

Am I a soldier of the cross, A follower of the Lamb,  
And shall I fear to own His cause, Or blush to speak His Name?

Must I be carried to the skies, On flow'ry beds of ease,  
While others fought to win the prize, And sailed through bloody seas?

Are there no foes for me to face? Must I not stem the flood?  
Is this vile world a friend to grace, To help me on to God?

Sure I must fight if I would reign; Increase my courage, Lord;  
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain, Supported by Thy Word.

Thy saints, in all this glorious war, Shall conquer, though they die;  
They view the triumph from afar, And seize it with their eye.

When that illustrious day shall rise, And all thine armies shine  
In robes of vict'ry through the skies, The glory shall be thine.

May the Lord grant us the grace day by day to live for His glory, and to stand faithful for the Lord regardless of the opposition that we face, whether it be great or small. Every persecution gives us the opportunity to glorify God, as well as to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Savior.

**THE SALT OF THE EARTH**

Matthew 5:13

**Intro:** In the Beatitudes which our Lord gave in the Sermon on the Mount, and which are recorded for us in Matthew 5, He was describing *the character of a true believer*. This does not mean that we all exercise these characteristics to the same degree, but it does mean that you will find all of these to some degree in all of us who are truly saved. And the more we grow in the Lord, the greater will be the evidence of these characteristics in our lives.

Going down the Beatitudes again, a person who really knows the Lord realizes that in himself, or herself, he is spiritually bankrupt, completely without any quality that would commend him, or her, to God. He is alienated from God, a sinner by nature and often by choice, under divine judgment.

Consequently he grieves over his sin. He mourns because of all that he has done which has been displeasing to God. He is truly repentant, and he turns away from his sin. And this brings the blessing of God, as the second Beatitude tells us.

This produces meekness, humility. And at this point he begins to take on the character of our Lord. To talk of self-love, and self-esteem, and self-worth, is very distasteful to a child of God because he knows that he has nothing to boast about in Himself. What he glories in, is what he has in Christ.

But every child of God needs to grow so as to become a stronger Christian. And so the Lord spoke of hungering and thirsting after righteousness. A true Christian wants to learn more about his Bible so that he can become more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

The result of his spiritual growth is that he becomes merciful in his attitude toward others. This leads to greater purity of heart, and he becomes a peacemaker. He does not want to be out of fellowship with other Christians, nor does he even want to have any broken relationships with people who do not know the Lord. As we are instructed to do, he seeks to “live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18).

However, in spite of all of the spiritual blessing and growth which he may experience, he learns from the first that the world is not concerned about

what is pleasing to God, and that in one way or another, and to differing degrees, he experiences persecution from the world. But he is even blessed in this because persecution, not only because he is suffering for Christ's sake, but because the persecution draws him even closer to the Lord, and makes him want to be more like the Lord. And he knows that in heaven he will experience even greater rewards for any persecution that he might have here on earth.

Now all that the Lord spoke about up to verse 13, which is our text for today, makes us "salt" and "light." But "salt" and "light" on a huge scale. We become "the salt of the earth," and "the light of the world." The ministry of the disciples was to begin in Israel with the Jews, but ultimately it was to expand to the whole earth, to the whole world!

But the Lord did not mean that they actually became "salt" and "light," but He meant that they would function as "salt" and as "light," and that their responsibility was aimed at the whole world. This did not mean that they would be able to go everywhere in the whole world, but it meant that wherever Christians were, whether in Israel, or in China, or in some Latin American country, or in Europe, or in the United States, we are all to consider ourselves to be "salt" and "light" to the people among whom we live and work, or even meet casually. We are to be to them as "salt" and as "light." Today we are thinking about "salt"; next week, the Lord willing, we will be thinking about what it means that we are "light."

So let us begin by asking a question we can all answer:

## I. WHAT IS SALT?

The dictionary tells us that salt is sodium chloride, and that its most common usage is for seasoning our food. We all have it in our homes in what we call *a salt shaker*. If you go into a restaurant, you will usually find sugar and salt and pepper on the table. People put salt on their food to make it taste better. Its form is white granules, and it is very difficult to distinguish it in its looks from sugar. I am sure that we all understand what salt is.

Salt has other uses, but I believe that the Lord was focusing on this one use of salt, seasoning food, because He went on to talk about it "savour." We could use the word *flavor*. But we will come to that in a moment.

But now let us go on to another question:

## II. WHY DID THE LORD SAY, “YE ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH”?

— The Lord was using this word as what we call, *a metaphor*. By this I mean that He was saying that *what salt is to food, we are to the message that we are trying to get to the people of the world..* He was telling His disciples that in their ministry to others, they would always be related to, and a part of, the message that they were giving to others.

The Lord brought that out in what He said to His disciples just before He ascended back to heaven. He told them,

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Notice those words, “and ye shall be witnesses unto me.” He did not say that they would just *give a witness*, but that they would “be witnesses”! They were to be living examples of the message that they were giving.

— People don’t really want to hear the Gospel. They are satisfied the way they are, and they don’t believe that they need God, or Jesus Christ. They don’t want us to talk to them about salvation. And they won’t listen until God does something to wake them up to their need.

Now the Lord could have sent angels with the Gospel, and they could have preached it to the people of the world. But He didn’t send angels with the Gospel except on very rare occasions. Or He could have placed a Bible in the hands of every person in the world, and there have been people who have been saved just reading the Bible. But the Lord didn’t decide to work that way. Or, the Lord could Himself have spoken from heaven, and He did that on certain occasions, but that is not the main way that He has chosen to get the Gospel to the people of the world. *What He has done is to send people who have been saved with the message of the Gospel, to tell people who aren’t saved how they can be saved. The most powerful way for the Gospel to be presented is when one person who knows the Lord, tells other people, either individually or in groups, how they can be saved.*

— I want you to see what an amazing statement this is, “Ye are the salt of the earth.”

If we go back to the first Beatitude and remember what the Lord said about us there, we learned that by nature we are “the poor in spirit,” utterly

unacceptable to God because of our sins, hopeless and helpless, lost, condemned, spiritually dead and thoroughly corrupted before God by our sin. The only influence we could have on others was to encourage them to keep on living their lives without God, without Christ, without the Bible, and without salvation. But by the miracle of His grace, He has so transformed us so as to make us “salt,” not just to a few people, but to all “the earth”! Who would ever have thought that we, sinners saved by grace, would have such an honored and exalted position. Think about those words: “Ye are the salt of the earth.” God has chosen to work through His people to make the Gospel, and all that is involved in the Gospel, something that people would want to eat.

Let me give you a couple of verses, one from the Old Testament, and one from the New Testament, which illustrate this.

David, the Psalmist, wrote on one occasion:

O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him (Psa. 34:8).

Don’t you wish that everyone would only “taste” of the Lord, and find out how wonderful He is, how “good”? Once they “taste” of Him, learning of Him and trusting Him, they will never find anyone else who is as wonderful as He is, and certainly no one who is better than He is. When many of those who were only disciples in name, turned and walked no more with Him, our Lord asked His true disciples, “Will ye also go away?” ( John 6: 67). Peter responded for all of them when he said,

68 Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

69 And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God (John 6:68-69).

You will never meet another person who can do for you what the Lord Jesus Christ can, and will, do.

The other couple of verses, a NT verse, that I want to give you, come from the pen of the Apostle Peter. They are found in 1 Pet. 2:2-3:

2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

There it is again: “Tasted.” If we could only get people to *taste* the goodness and grace of God in Christ.

I said I would give you two verses, let me add just two more. They are found in John 6:53-54:

53 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

54 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

This is one way our Lord described what it means to trust Him as Savior. We spiritually, and genuinely, feed upon Him.

But the big question is, How can we get people to taste and see how good the Lord is?

Well, we can't. God has to do that. But one way that He has chosen to work is by making us "salt" on the Gospel. And what does it mean to be "salt"? We have just learned in the Beatitudes. If we are the kind of people whom the Lord described in the Beatitudes, even though most of the world will revile us and persecute us for our faith, yet God will use us by the very lives we live to enable others to see what it means to be a Christian. How will the Lord use us to get people to "taste" of the Gospel? It will be when our lives show how the Gospel has transformed our lives. Have you ever heard a person say who had become a Christian, what brought them to Christ, and have them answer something like this? "I saw what I wanted in the life of a Christian. I didn't know what it was, but I learned that it was Christ. And I trusted in Him, and He saved me." Let me repeat: This is not something that you and I do, but one way, a major way, in which God uses His people to bring them to Christ.

Oh, how we need to concentrate on what the Lord said in the Beatitudes until they are descriptive of us! How different things could be in the world today if every Christian were what we might call, *a Beatitude Christian!*

But now I want to point out what the Lord said in the following words which I hope will make all of us "sit up and take notice." The Lord spoke of those times when:

### III. THE SALT LOSES ITS SAVOUR?

Savour means *flavor*. I understand that pure salt can never lose its savour, and yet I am told that the salt which was used in Palestine was not pure salt, and that often it did have the sodium chloride washed out of it. The Greek verb which the Lord used for salt losing its savour, is μωραίνω. It speaks of "salt that has lost its strength and flavor" (Thayer, p. 420). It is

salt which has become “flat and tasteless” (*Ibid.*). And when this happens, as our Lord said, “it is good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”

— But let me take the case of pure salt. Was the Lord saying here that there is something which can happen to His people who are “the salt of the earth” that never happens to pure salt? He surely was saying that we can lose our savour. And then He said, in effect, “When my people lose their savour, their flavor, what will the people of the earth do?”

But let me ask: ***How can this happen?***

It happens when we as the people of God forget the truth that the Lord was teaching in the Beatitudes. We forget that we are only sinners saved by grace. It may have been a long time since we have shed a tear over our sins. We begin to pattern our lives after the world instead of seeking to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. We become proud instead of seeking to be humble. We don’t read our Bibles as much as we used to. We are not really hungering to be like our dear Savior. We don’t love the Lord like we used to love Him. We envy sinners instead of showing mercy toward them. We buy the lie that is circulating around our country now that character does not matter instead of seeking to be pure in heart. We get along fine in the world because nobody can tell by the way we live that we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

What does the Lord say about those who lose their savour?

“It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.” “Good for nothing.” Is that the Lord’s evaluation of any of us today because we have forgotten the Beatitudes, and can no longer be called, *a Beatitude Christian*?

We console ourselves that we still believe the Bible to be the Word of God. And we still believe in the Deity of Christ. And we believe that the only salvation there is, is in Christ. But do we believe that “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

— Do you and I want to be “salt” in this terrible world in which we are living? If so, there is only one way, and that is that we need to be walking in daily fellowship with the Lord in the kind of a life which has been set before us by the Lord in the Beatitudes. The church has gone mad after

entertainment. We are trying to do the Lord's work in the world's way, and that makes the church "good for nothing." But even where we sing the old hymns and concentrate on the ministry of the Bible as the Word of God, let us be careful that in our pride about what we are doing, or in our willingness to be hearers of the Word, but not doers of the Word, we have lost, or are losing our savour, so that our lives are not demonstrating by God's grace, what it means to be saved, to be a child of God, and to be strangers and foreigners here because we are citizens of heaven.

**Concl:** Yesterday when we were taking our Carolyn to the airport for her flight back to Orlando, we were following a car which had a special license plate which had this spelled out on it. The letter "B" follow by the letters S-U-M. And then the letter "1." And so when you read it, it said, "Be some one." I don't know what the person who made that up had in mind, but I had been thinking about my text for today, and it struck a response with me. I'm not concerned about being somebody famous so that everyone knows who I am. But I am concerned about being "the salt of the earth." And I believe that most of you are, too. Let's take stock of our own lives today. Go back and read over the Beatitudes, and ask yourself, as I will ask myself, "Are these descriptive of me, or, at least, of what I really want to be before the Lord?" Maybe we haven't been walking as close to the Lord as we think we have. It might be that some changes need to be made in our lives. The people around us will only be able to see in us how wonderful the Lord is, when we are showing by our lives that we really love Him, and that the one thing that we want to do more than anything else is to be pleasing to the Lord.

May God help us to be "salt" in our generation, trusting Him to use us to cause others to see their need of Christ and of God.



## THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Matthew 5:14-16

**Intro:** We have been learning in the Beatitudes about *the character of a true Christian*. I use the word *true* of a Christian because there are many people who call themselves Christians who are not in reality what the Word of God means when it speaks of *what a Christian is*. Actually the term *Christian* is not the best word to describe one who has been born again, one who is a child of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The expression *Christian*, or *Christians* (plural), is only found three times in all of the Bible.

Soon after the martyrdom of Stephen, followed by the salvation of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, and the preaching of Peter to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius, some of the disciples went as far north as Antioch in Syria preaching the Gospel. A mighty work was done there, and many people were saved. Barnabas was sent up to Antioch by the church in Jerusalem to see what was going on. When he arrived, he became thoroughly convinced that God had done a work there. He left Antioch and went farther north to Tarsus to get Saul of Tarsus. The two of them came back to Antioch and spent a whole year teaching the new believers in Antioch. And it is concerning those believers that it is recorded for us by Luke in Acts 11:26b, “And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” So it seems that it was a word which was given to the those who were trusting in Christ by those who did not believe. The word actually means *one who follows Christ*. It evidently was originally a term of reproach by which the people of the world identified those who became followers of Christ. It was only after many years that the people who loved the Lord used this word to describe themselves.

When Paul preached the Gospel to Agrippa and his wife Bernice, you will remember that Agrippa said to Paul, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28). How sincere Agrippa was, we do not know, but probably his persuasion was not very deep.

The third and last time that the word is used we find in 1 Pet. 4:16 where we have these words, reading verse 15 with it:

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.

16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (1 Pet. 4:15-16).

It is very likely that Peter was using the word as it was used in the first

century. If so, he meant that if any of them suffered as a despised follower of Jesus Christ, then “let him glorify God on this behalf.”

But now the word has become so generally accepted that it is used almost by anybody and everybody. To show how far the word has been stretched out, some people even speak of the United States as “a Christian nation” when it is anything but truly Christian.

So we in dealing with the Beatitudes are dealing with those who are *truly* Christian, those who really believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin. The early Christians were called *saints*. They were people who were characterized by holy living. They were holy people. They had been transformed by the new birth. They were new creatures in Christ. They were sons of God.

And so we can say that the people who are characterized by the Beatitudes which our Lord gave at this time were, as the Lord went on to say beginning with verse 13, “salt,” and then in our text for today in verses 14 through 16, “the light of the world.”

Let us examine this expression, and be assured that if you really know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, this describes you. A true Christian is:

## **I. THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD (Matt. 5:14a).**

The Lord was indicating that His disciples, all of them, were “the light of the world” – not *a light*, but “the light.” It is true that the Psalmist said, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa. 119:105), and he also said that “the entrance of Thy Word giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple” (Psa. 119:130). And we as the people of God must preach the Word. We must bear testimony to the Word of God, *but it also must be true that we who carry the Word to the people of the world must be*, can I say it this way? the embodiment of the message we proclaim. Our Lord said, “Ye,” all of you who know me and love me because you have been changed by Me, “ye are the light of the world.” And I repeat: not *a light*, one among many different kinds of light in the world, but “the light.”

What does this tell us about “the world”? It tells us that the world is in darkness, but that the world also is darkness. And Scripture bears this out.

And so this brings us to ask a question:

## II. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF DARKNESS?

I have already quoted to you Psalm 119:130 where we learn that the coming of God's Word gives light, "it gives understanding to the simple." So in that verse we are taught that since the light gives understanding, it is at least implied that darkness speaks of *ignorance*. And how true that is! We didn't know much more about God than that He existed, and that He is the Creator, before the Lord opened our eyes to the Word. We didn't know about His greatness and His majesty, His holiness and His power, until the Word of God was given to us. We didn't know what our need is, nor what the remedy for that need was. We were darkness and we were in darkness. The Apostle Paul told the people of God in Ephesus,

For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light (Eph. 5:8).

Another way that the Bible describes our former ignorance is by pointing out that darkness means blindness. The Apostle John tells us that the one who hates is brother "walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth because that darkness hath blinded his eyes" (1 John 2:11). Now John was talking about our spiritual blindness.

You see evidence of this every day. People think that they have the right to do anything that they want to do, and they are ignorant of the fact that God is the One Who is sovereign in the earth. They think that they can determine for themselves what is right and what is wrong, and the person who feels that way is only revealing his own ignorance. We all were spiritually blind at one time, and it is only God Who can give us sight, the eyes to see the truth about God and the truth about ourselves and the truth about truth. Whether people want to believe it or not, truth is not relative; truth is absolute! And right and wrong are determined by God Who never changes. So what has always been wrong in God's sight, is still wrong today. And what has always been right in God's sight, is still right today! Our cultures may change, and people may accept things today which were rejected generations ago, but man's acceptance does not change the truth! And people who think that the truth changes, are only displaying their ignorance. And it is an ignorance which has eternal consequences – dire consequences, worse than people can possibly imagine!

Well, how did we ever get out of the darkness we were in. Who is the only One Who can give us sight?

## III. ONLY GOD CAN GIVE SIGHT TO THE BLIND.

Creation itself can teach us a great deal about salvation. In Gen. 1:2 we are told that originally “the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” Where, then, did the light come from? On the first day of creation, “God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” God gave light to this universe in which we live, and what is so amazing about what I have just read to you is that He gave light before there was a sun, or a moon, or stars. Don’t ask me how that could be, but it was! Read your Bible and you will find that there was no sun, moon, nor stars until the fourth day of creation, but there was light on the first day, and the second day, and the third day.

Let me give you an illustration from our Lord’s ministry on earth.

John 9 gives us the account of a man who had been blind from birth. We don’t know how old he was, but he was a man! Jewish boys were considered to be “of age” when they were thirteen, but the account in John 9 gives us the impression that this person was a man, not just a boy. And he had never seen. But the Lord did something which had never been done before. In John 9:32 we read what the man said to the Jewish leaders who were questioning him about what had happened. This is what he said,

Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.

I can’t say for sure how this man knew this, but I can imagine that he had talked to people, asking them questions about this, perhaps had his parents read to him from sources that were available at the time, to find out if there had ever been a person in any nation at any time who had been born blind, but later had been able to see. And he could not find a single instance where that had happened, but it had happened to him! The Lord had put clay on his eyes, and just told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. He went, and he washed, and he came back *seeing*! The Lord Who had created man in the beginning gave him his sight.

This story is given in Scripture to illustrate a great spiritual truth. The Apostle Paul stated it in 2 Cor. 4:5-7. Listen to what we read in those three verses:

5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.

6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

That is how every person becomes a child of God. God shines the truth into our hearts. And just as He commanded the light to shine on that first day of creation, and suddenly it shone, so when God intends to save anyone, He shines the truth of His Word into that person's heart, and for the first time in their lives *they see – they see the truth about how blinded, guilty sinners, can be saved!*

Let me give you another verse which says essentially the same thing. The Apostle Paul, in writing to the church at Colosse, told them that they should be continually “giving thanks unto the Father ... who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son” (Col. 1:12-13). You see, in addition to our natural spiritual blindness, Satan, who is “the power of darkness,” “hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, Who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor. 4:4).

So for anyone here today who is still blinded to the truth of the Gospel, the message of salvation, pray that the Lord will give you eyes to see, and ears to hear, and a heart to understand, so that by God's grace you can believe, and see, and be saved. And pray that prayer right where you are, and expect that the Lord will hear your prayer and save you before you leave this place today.

But now let me go back to the words at the beginning of our text.

#### **IV. THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD (Matt. 5:14).**

Most of you know that the Lord spoke these words to His disciples, and that these words speak equally to us. Those of us who are saved, are this very day “the light of the world.”

But someone says, “Isn't this a title that the Lord claimed for Himself?” And I will have to answer, “Yes, it is!” And you will find where He claimed it in John 8:12:

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

And you will find that He said the same thing in John 9, the chapter which tells us of the man who was born blind to whom the Lord gave sight. But here the Lord made His statement in a slightly different, and very interesting way. You will find it in John 9:5, and this is what the Lord said,

As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

What did He mean, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world”? This ought to lead us to ask, “What happens, Lord, when you are no longer in the world?” Isn’t the Lord still the light of the world? Of course He is! But people do not see Him today. He is spiritually present in us and with us, but not visibly present. So what happened to the light when the Lord went back to heaven? This is where our text for today gives us our answer.

How are people who are in darkness, blinded from their very conception, going to see the light if the Lord Jesus is in heaven? This is what makes our role in this life so very important. Everywhere there is a child of God, there is a light. And everywhere there is a church, there is a concentration of that light. That is why the Lord Jesus said, “Ye are the light of the world.” We don’t really take His place, but we are His instruments to carry the light to the people in our generation. We are the light of the world by what we are, and we are the light of the world by the truth of the Gospel which we proclaim.

But now let us look at the rest of our text as it applies to us as “the light of the world.”

— The Lord likened His disciples to a city which is set on a hill. And then he likened them to a candle, or lamp, which is in a house.

In the first figure of speech we have the united testimony, or light, which we give as the people of God. In the second, the candle, or lamp, pictures us individually at home. In both cases we have the idea that we cannot be hidden. Unitedly, and we can apply this to us as a church, the Lord has placed us where we are, like a city on a hill, and we cannot be hidden. We are going to be seen. In fact, attention will be drawn to us by the very fact that we are lights shining in a dark place.

The disciples of our Lord were like a city which is set on a hill. People were watching them, just as they were watching the Lord. And people noticed the difference between our Lord and His disciples, as compared with their scribes and Pharisees. Their lives were different, and so was their message. And Christians in every generation are like a city which is set on a hill.

— **Illus:** During college days, preaching in the country where it was night it was very dark. No lights in the homes, nor on the country roads. But as I drove back into Waco after church on Sunday night, the lights of

the city were seen first of all reflected in the night sky, and then the lights themselves could be seen as I got nearer the city. Waco was not set on a hill, but I remember how good it was to get out of that intense darkness back into the light of the city.

In the same way, all of us are like candles, or portable lamps, in our homes. I am sure that thousands upon thousands of times since I went away from home to go to college I have reflected upon the light that my Dad was and the light that my mother was.

In both cases which our Lord was speaking about, His comments were based upon what we are. If we know Christ, we are lights whether we know it or not, and whether we like it or not. Sometimes because of sin in our lives, the light may be very dim. In fact, it may be so dim at times that people may wonder if we are really saved. But whether we are with others in a situation like a church, or in our homes where we may be one among many who know the Lord, or we might even be the only Christian, God has placed us where we are to shine. And how do we shine? By making sure that the Beatitudes are descriptive of us, that is, by maintaining the closest possible fellowship with the Lord.

Now the emphasis in this illustration is upon the fact that we are seen. And so our Lord was talking about our character and our conduct. What we have to say is secondary here. It is by our character and conduct as “the light of the world” that God will work through us to get other people to pay attention to the message that we have to give.

And so our Lord concluded with the exhortation that we have in verse 16. (Read.) Remember that “good works” in Scripture do not just mean service of some kind, but they include the whole of our lives. The emphasis is on the word “see.”

And we don’t live so as to attract attention to ourselves, but that we might “glorify” our “Father which is in heaven.” People can’t see Him, but they can see us, and what they see in us always reflects upon Him, either positively or negatively. Let us live to glorify, to magnify Him.

**Concl:** Can there possibly be any more important ministry that you and I have in this world than to be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world?” Remember we don’t choose what we are to be, nor we choose where we are to be. If we are saved, we are “salt,” and we are “light.” The point is, how are we doing as “salt,” and how are we doing as

“the light”? Are we walking in such close fellowship with the Lord that our very lives confirm that we belong to the Lord, and do our lives cause others to want to know Him? Do we by our lives give an accurate picture of what our Lord is like? Only God can possibly make us sufficient for the ministry the God has given to each one of us.

I conclude by reminding you of Peter’s exhortation to the people of God in his own day who had been scattered throughout the Empire, away from their homes, and some away from their families. This is what he said:

9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation (1 Pet. 2:9-12).

May God enable us to be salt with a rich flavor, and lights that shine brightly in this world which has much darkness and little true light, that even in these evil days we may see many special evidences of the blessing of God, and may it all be for His glory alone.



**CHRIST AND THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW**

Matthew 5:17-20

**Intro:** Today I am returning to my series on the Sermon on the Mount after turning aside on Easter Sunday to speak about the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Together we have gone through the first sixteen verses of Matthew 5, and Matthew 5 is just the first of three chapters in Matthew devoted to this very important message.

We have seen that in the Beatitudes that they give us the characteristics of a true Christian, such virtues as humility, meekness, mercy, purity of heart, and the like, which together make up holiness. But we have also seen that these make us “salt” and “light” in this world. So that it is a godly character which makes us qualified to serve the Lord, and to have the Lord’s blessing. This all takes us through verse 16 of Matthew 5, and forms the foundation of the whole “sermon.”

Beginning with verse 17 we come to a new section in the Lord’s message to His disciples. It has to do with both the Old Testament, and the life that it teaches. And the Lord said this because He was going to reveal in a deeper way the meaning of some of the commandments that were given in the Old Testament. He wanted His disciples to know that what He was giving them was not something new, something unrelated to what had been revealed before, but it was a deeper look into the meaning of the Word that had already been revealed. And so we turn, first of all, to what the Lord said about,

**I. “THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS” (Matt. 5:17-18).**

We should recognize that He was speaking of the books of the Law, the first five books of the OT, and also about the prophetic books of the OT. But the expression goes beyond that. *This term, “the law, and the prophets,” was one way the Jews had of referring to all of the Old Testament.*

You will find it again right here in the Sermon on the Mount. See Matt. 7:12. (Read.)

Next we see these two expressions in Matt. 11:13: “For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.” Then, when a Pharisee, who was a

lawyer, asked the Lord which was the great commandment in the Law, the Lord responded by giving him two, the first and the second in order of greatness – the first was to love the Lord with all of our hearts ... ; and the second was that we love our neighbors as we love ourselves. And then the Lord said this: “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt. 22:40). And so the Lord was saying that in all of the Old Testament there are no commandments that are more important than these, and that they are really the sum and substance of all obedience to the Lord.

In the first chapter of John’s Gospel, when Philip went to tell Nathanael about the Lord, this is what he said to him: “We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45).

There is also a very important passage in the book of Romans which uses both of these terms in referring to the Old Testament. It is Rom. 3:19-22:

19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference.

The Lord did not come to “destroy the law, or the prophets.” That is, He did not come *to do away with it, i.e.,* the Old Testament, but He came *to fulfill it*. You see, we aren’t to throw the OT away just because Christ has come. But the Lord came to show that it was true, and He came *to complete* the message it gave.

Thus, we have here our Lord’s confirmation of the authority of the OT, and we can see that further by the many times in the Gospels our Lord quoted from the OT to support what He was teaching. And so we see that the NT is built upon the foundation of the OT. Although are correctly separated into OT and NT, yet they are actually one revelation. In fact, each helps us in the understanding of the other.

Somewhere I read in the works of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones that he did not like for the NT to be printed by itself. He felt that it gave the idea that the

OT was not as important anymore as it used to be, and he probably had a good point for us to consider. *There is a marvelous unity about the OT and the NT which adds to the evidence that it is all the Word of God!*

- The Lord came in fulfillment of much that was predicted of Him, and He will finally fulfill all that is predicted of Him when He comes again. But He did not want His disciples to think that He was doing away with the OT. It is true that some of His teaching even in this chapter marked a change from what was taught in the OT, but the teaching was all consistent with what had been taught before.

At the beginning of verse 18 the Lord used an expression that He used many times during His ministry here on earth. It is, “For verily I say unto you.” In this chapter it is reduced to, “But I say unto you,” as you see it in verses 22, or as it appears in verse 26. And it is the equivalent of the OT expression, “Thus said the Lord.” The Lord Jesus, being the Son of God, absolute Deity, could make such a statement for Himself which no prophet in the OT, nor apostle in the NT could say about himself. Our Lord spoke with the same authority as God the Father would speak, or that the Holy Spirit would exercise.

- Then what did the Lord say? (Read the remainder of verse 18.)

By this statement the Lord was indicating that there were still many things in the OT which had not yet been fulfilled, but He wanted to assure His disciples that they would be. We all can recognize that the Lord had not died as yet when He spoke these words, and so all of that was yet to take place.

There is in this statement that the Lord made about jots and tittles that confirms the verbal inspiration of the Word of God. The word “jot” refers to the tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet which is like a comma in English which is lifted above the line. And so it is the smallest of all of the Hebrew letters. A “tittle” is the extension of a line which makes a Hebrew “r” different from a “d.” J. A. Alexander said in his commentary on Matthew that it would be like we would say, “Not a word, syllable, or even a letter will be changed from the way that God gave it in the OT.” We can be assured that God will not forget a promise, nor is it possible that He has ever made a promise that He will not be able to fulfill. It is like the Apostle Paul said in 2 Cor. 1:20:

For all the promises of God in him [Christ] are yea, and in him [Christ] Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

The disciples had not been used to hearing teaching like this. Notice the two verses following the conclusion of this sermon, Matt. 7:28-29. (Read.) But what an encouragement this must have been to those who were listening to the Lord. The traditions of the Jews had been so mixed in with the Word of God that most people, and probably not even the scribes and Pharisees, knew the difference between the Word of God and the additions that had been made to the Scriptures throughout the years before.

However, while the promises were included in what the Lord was saying, the emphasis that He made in these four verses was not on the promises, but on the commandments of Scripture. We have seen in the Beatitudes what the disciples were *to be*; at this point the Lord was about to begin to emphasize what they were *to do*!

And so our second point has to do with:

## **II. THE COMMANDMENTS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS (Matt. 5:19-20).**

I spoke a moment ago about the “great” commandments in the Law. But there were other commandments which were “the least.” This doesn’t mean that they were not important, but that they were not as important as others. Let me give you an illustration.

In Matthew 23 we have a chapter full of the Lord’s denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees, whom He called “hypocrites.” And among the woes which He pronounced on them, one was this:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone (Matt. 23:23).

Here the situation is reversed from what the Lord was talking about in our text, but I call your attention to the statement, “the weightier matters of the law.” The Lord commended them for their tithing, but condemned them for their failure in “judgment, mercy, and faith.” Now if it had been just the opposite, and they had been strong on “judgment, mercy, and faith,” but weak on tithing, their offence would not have been nearly as important. But still, even to omit the lesser matters of the law, either through ignorance or just plain disobedience, would have lowered them among the people of God, but would not have been the grounds for putting them out of the kingdom. It would have been something like the Apostle Paul

described as being saved, “yet so as by fire” (1 Cor. 3:15b). There will be people who will be saved, but they will be lacking in rewards. And it would be surprising to find any believer who intentionally wanted to be in that category.

The latter category which the Lord mentioned is what we all should strive for: “But whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” You see, even the least of the commandments is important. All that the Lord has told us to do, we must do. We might think that we can find reasons for not telling the truth in certain situations, but lying is always contrary to the Word and will of God. You may have instances in Scripture where people lied, and blessing followed, but that does not prove that they were right. It only proves that God is often gracious to us when we don’t deserve it. Abraham failed to trust the Lord when he went on down from Canaan into Egypt because there was a famine in Canaan, but now we will never know what the Lord would have done to take care of him if he had stayed where he belonged. The same is true when Elimelech took his family into Moab for the same reason.

Where do we find greatness in the kingdom of heaven? We find it with those who “do and teach” the commandments of the Lord.

Did you notice the order there? *Doing* must go before *teaching* if we expect to have the blessing of God upon our lives and upon our teaching. Parents, be sure to notice this. Do you want your children to live in obedience to God’s Word? The key is for you to be living in obedience to His Word. This is true in a church. The blessing of God is upon a ministry when the leaders are being obedient to the Lord.

This was the great failure of the scribes and Pharisees. Much of their teaching was good, but it was in their lives that you would find the problems. In that same 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Matthew from which I read a verse a moment ago, the chapter where the Lord denounced the scribes and Pharisees as hypocrites, this is the way the chapter begins:

- 1 Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,
- 2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:
- 3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.
- 4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.
- 5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men ... (Matt.

23:1-5a).

What a sad condition Israel was in during the days of our Lord upon the earth! What was the righteousness of the Pharisees? The Lord indicated here that if the people lived like the Pharisees did, they would not be saved! What an indictment that was! The Lord accused them of robbing widows. Cf. Matt. 23:14). And in the same verse said that their prayers were only a public display, and so they were not true prayers. He called them *children of hell* in Matt. 23:15. He said they were “blind guides” (Matt. 23:16). And He called them *fools*, meaning that they didn’t know what they were talking about. But this is what the Lord said about their righteousness:

27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity (Matt. 23:27-28).

Their righteousness was all on the outside, but there was no reality on the inside, in their hearts.

I think we all know how easy it is to act the part, to pretend outwardly that things are right between us and the Lord, when we know that our hearts are not right.

What does it mean to be righteous? Well, it means, as I have explained before, that we are seeking to live according to the standard set before us in the Word of God. A righteous person is a holy person, but it is impossible for us to be holy without being obedient, and it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can be obedient to the Word of God. The Word tells us what we are to do and what we are *not* to do, and the Word is powerful as the Holy Spirit uses it in our lives to make us obedient to God. Obedience is the key to righteousness and holiness. And as we grow in our obedience to the Word of God, we are growing in our likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The righteousness of the Pharisees was a righteousness of which they were seeking to produce by their own works, which never is true righteousness.

The Apostle Paul had been a Pharisee, and he had fallen into the same trap as other Pharisees, thinking he was making himself acceptable to God. He boasted that he was a Pharisee. But after he came to know the Lord, this is

what he had to say about himself:

7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith (Phil. 3:7-9).

You see, it was not religion that he needed; it was Christ! And it is not religion that people need today. There is and always has been too much religion. The One we need is Christ. He died for the forgiveness of our sins. And He alone can make us new in our hearts, a new creation. And with Christ in us, and through obedience to the Word, we then can become what God wants us to be – holy in character and holy in life.

**Concl:** This leads me to ask two questions as I close.

First, Does your righteousness “exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? I mean by that, Is your righteousness something that you put on each Sunday, and when you are with certain people, or do your family and friends, your neighbors and the people you work with, know that there is something very different about you because your life is different? If not, then there is no better time for you to seek the Lord than right here today. The Lord said that the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees would never get them into the kingdom of heaven. May you look to the Lord to meet your need today. The Law cannot save you, and the Law cannot make you holy. Only God as your faith is in Christ can save you.

My second question applies to most of us here today: How careful are you about your obedience to the Word of God? Do you know that there can be no real fellowship with the Lord if you are not obedient to the Lord? And you will never be a truly holy person until your life is lived in obedience to the Word of God.

I was reading 1 Thessalonians this past week and I was struck with an expression that the Apostle Paul used twice in chapter 4. The first time, in verse 1b, he exhorted the believers in Thessalonica “to walk and to please God, so that ye would abound more and more.” And then in verse 10 after

he had mentioned that they should love one another, then he followed with this: “And we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more.”

The NASB used the word “excel” in both places. “That ye excel still more.” What did he mean? He meant that as much as you have been seeking to walk with God, and to please Him, seek every day to walk more closely with Him and to please him more today than you did yesterday.

And the same applies to our love for each other. Let us never be satisfied that we are as obedient as we can be, because we aren’t! We can always be more obedience, more faithful, more pleasing to God, and more loving toward each other. So let our righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, and then keep on excelling in righteousness until the Lord comes, or until He calls us home.



**NEW LIGHT ON AN OLD LAW**

Matthew 5:21-26

**Intro:** As we come to this statement by which the Lord began to correct some false ideas concerning the Law, we need to remember two things that the Lord had just said to His disciples as He proceeded with His teaching. The first is what He said in Matt. 5:17: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.”

The moral standards in the Law never change. What was wrong in Moses’ day from a moral standpoint, was wrong in our Lord’s day, and continues to be wrong today. And it is significant that the Lord did not start with any of the first five commandments which had to do with worshiping only Him, and with making graven images, or with taking the Lord’s Name in Dail, or with the Sabbath, or about honoring our parents, but he began with the first of the commandments which actually had to do with the relationships which the people had in their relationships with each other. And He selected, “Thou shalt not kill,” which was the sixth commandment.

Those who translate this commandment, “Thou shalt not murder,” are absolutely right in their translation. The Lord was not saying they were not to kill anybody under any circumstances because many of the violations of the Law were punishable by physical death. But no person had the right to take the life of another person unless it was confirmed by the judges that the accused person was, in reality, guilty.

The Lord did not come to change this, but He came to “fulfill” it. That is, He came to make clear the real meaning of this command.

Long before God gave the Law to Moses, He had declared that this was a law which would apply to all people. I am referring to Gen. 9:6: “Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.” This did not mean that men had the right to take the law in their own hands, and kill others whenever they wanted to, but, as we learn from Romans 13, God with that declaration in Genesis 9 was setting up the conditions which would be in effect for the nations of the earth. Rom. 13:3, 4 says this with respect to the leaders of governments and those who serve with them:

3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.  
Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good,

and thou shalt have praise of the same:

4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil (Rom. 13:3-4).

In our day, the almost universal rejection of the doctrine of creation, has caused us to set aside this command of God which, from Paul's quotation in Romans, applies to Gentile nations as well as the Jews. And failure to abide by this Law of God leads to the destruction of the nation that refuses to observe it, that is, even its first form, Gen. 9:6: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."

The problem which the Lord was addressing, was, as we shall see, that the teachers of the Law had given this sixth law of the decalogue, merely a judicial interpretation, but not a moral interpretation extending beyond the case where one person murders another person. It certainly applied to that, but there was much more contained in that sixth law than just the case of murder.

Now because of this many people were made to feel very smug and safe in connection with this law because they had never actually killed anyone. To illustrate this, I want to read a passage to you found in Luke 18:18-21:

18 And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

19 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God.

20 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, **Do not kill**, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother.

21 And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up.

It probably was the case that he had never actually committed an act of adultery, nor had he ever murdered anyone. So we can assume that he was telling the truth.

Even the Apostle Paul was reviewing his own life before he was saved, and although he had been responsible for arresting many Christians, some of whom probably were put to death, he felt that "touching the righteousness which is of the Law," he was "blameless."

We can assume that the same was true about most of the Pharisees. They

had never actually killed anyone, and so they felt very self-righteous before the Law.

But this brings me to a second statement which our Lord made, and you will find it in Matt. 5:20:

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

This is the equivalent of saying that unless you have more righteousness than the Pharisees do, you won't be saved.

There were only two of the ten commandments which were not negative: the one about the Sabbath, and the one about parents. So that if the Jews had thought that salvation was by the Law, they would have concluded that you are saved on the basis that you haven't done certain bad things – like murder, adultery, stealing, lying, or coveting.

Now let us look at our text, and notice how

## **I. THE LORD THREW GREATER LIGHT ON THIS TEXT (Matt. 5:21-22).**

First He stated the Law as it had been taught, and then gave the true interpretation.

There have been various ways in which the words, “by them of old time,” in verse 21 have been interpreted. Some take it to mean by Moses and those who were teaching with him, but it would seem unreasonable that Moses did not understand the full meaning of the Law. And so many expositors take the “them” to point to false teachers of the past, reaching far back into Israel's history, and so it was these teachers who were perverted in their understanding of the Law, and they gave the people the wrong idea. Remember: the commandment as it stands condemned murder, and those who were guilty of murder, paid for their crime with their lives. But that did not exhaust the meaning of the commandment.

The charge of murder would leave most people to feel that they stood uncondemned before this law, but that would not be the case with what the Lord went on to say. *What did He say?* Our answer is in verse 21.  
(Read.)

The words, “in danger of the judgment” in both verses 21 and 22 mean

that which is stated, *e.g.*, in Ex.21:12, “He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death.” If one man killed another accidentally, that was different, but where it was intentional, death was the judgment.

— But the Lord cited three other cases;

### **A. Anger.**

Not all anger is wrong. One of the attributes of God is *anger, wrath*. We can say that there are times when it is wrong not to be angry, as when a couple of kids take guns to school and kill a teacher and three students, and wound several others. But even then it is not our place to take action.

— Whenever there is a murder, usually anger has something to do with it. The very first murder in the Bible is full of instruction for us. The Lord here was speaking of *anger without a cause*, and that was the problem with Cain when he killed his brother Abel. Cain was very angry when his offering was rejected, and Abel’s was accepted. Abel had done nothing to cause Cain to be mad at him. And do you remember the questions the Lord asked Cain. He said, “Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?” (Gen. 4: 6b-7a). There was absolutely no reason why Cain should be angry with Abel, but he was! And his anger caused him to kill his brother!

Matthew Henry cited three explanations for anger “without cause”:

- 1) When we are angry at others for mistakes or forgetfulness which we could so easily be guilty ourselves, and probably have been.
- 2) When we get angry just to show our authority, or because we deliberately want to hurt someone when we have the opportunity.
- 3) When our anger goes far beyond what is reasonable when there has been an offence.

Obviously words often come into play in situations like I have been describing, but in the case of Cain it seems that he kept his anger to himself. But, depending upon the cause of anger, words usually are the expression of our anger. And one word that the Lord used to express anger was

### **B. “Raca.”**

— Thayer, in his Greek Lexicon, says that this was a word which Jews in our Lord’s day used against each other. It was used to show scorn for another.

It would be the equivalent of what we might say to another, “Don’t you have any sense?” The object is not to correct, or simply point out a fault that needs to be corrected, but to ridicule and to belittle someone else because of what they have done. It means that you think the person is worthless and hopeless. This is the only time this word is used in the NT.

But another word is:

### C. “Fool.”

This is the translation of the Greek word from which we get our word *moron*. And it draws the greatest punishment. Vine says that this word is so bad because it is an attack upon a man’s heart and upon his character. He is pictured as one who has never had any sense, and is incapable of it, one who is not fit to live.

Now while the situations which our Lord has pictured could involve a Christian with a non-Christian, yet you can see that when this involves two people who claim to be believers in Christ, this is where it is the most serious. And yet the Apostle Paul told the Colossian believers to

Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.

Let your speech be always with grace seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man (Col. 4:5-6).

However, the action which the Lord was condemning here is in direct violation of what He said was the second greatest commandment in the Law: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 22:39; Lev. 19:18).

The action which is described by the Lord here might not lead to actual murder, but the attitudes are such that lead to murder, and are justly condemned by God. So you see it is not just the act of murder that this commandment condemns, but those feelings which lead to murder, and which are in themselves what has been called “tongue-murder.

We need to lay alongside of this all that Scripture has to say about *oneness* among those of us who are believers, and judge ourselves for the kind of behavior that the Lord was describing in these verses.

But what the Lord had to say about the sixth commandment did not end with verse 22. It went on to verses 23 through 26, and it may be a little difficult for us at the first to see the connection between these last four verses with the two which we have just considered. However, a little

thought and insight given to us by the Holy Spirit will help us to see that the Lord was exhorting us to consider what we could do to avoid situations where others might be angry with us.

## **II. THE LORD'S COUNSEL ON KEEPING OTHERS FROM BEING ANGRY WITH US (Matt. 5:23-26).**

All of this is a part of what the Lord had to say about the sixth commandment in the Law: "Thou shalt not kill."

(Read verses 23-26.)

Now we all know that there are some things that cannot be made right. If people want us to compromise with the truth of God's Word, of course we cannot do that. And there are some situations which people refuse to settle with us. But we must not close our minds and hearts to every situation just because in some there can be, or seems to be, no solution.

Bringing our gift to the altar speaks of worshiping God. But even that can be acceptable or not acceptable to God depending upon our relationships with each other. The fact that a judge and an officer and even prison are involved here, suggests that the problem the Lord was addressing, was money. The Lord may have used this illustration because it is so common, but also to state the extreme so that we would know that everything else, even lesser matters, are included.

We need to be just as concerned that we are not causing an offence to someone else as we are to avoid anger ourselves when others have offended us. We need to avoid those feelings of anger toward others which are displeasing to God, but we need to be equally concerned that we are not doing something which causes others to be angry with us. Thus, a full understanding of this sixth commandment includes both of these situations.

**Concl:** So the problem suggested by the sixth commandment, was not merely a judicial problem for the courts to decide, but it was a spiritual problem centered in the heart. Solomon's word given almost 3,000 years ago is a good word for us today: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). The feelings which lead to murder get started in the heart. But those same feelings, although they may not lead to murder, are destructive to our fellowship with the Lord, and hinder us in seeing the blessing of the Lord upon our

service. How appropriate was Paul's word to his enemies when speaking in his own defense he indicated to them that he was concerned first about his relationship with God, and, after that, with his relationship with men. Here are the words he spoke to them:

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men (Acts 24:16).

For many years Dr. T. J. Bach attended the Missionary Conference at Multnomah and Central Bible Church. He was for many years the Director of the Evangelical Alliance Mission, a man of prayer, and a man of the Word. He had a lot of quaint sayings which reflected a very close walk with the Lord. Instead of being called "Dr. Bach," he preferred being called "Brother Bach." The time came when he was no longer able to come to the conference because of great physical weakness just a short time before his death. But he sent a message to all of us in Portland by one of the missionaries who visited him in California just before coming up to our missionary conference. And this was his message: "Tell the people at Central Bible Church and at Multnomah that Brother Bach is on the "in's" with God, and on the "out's" with no man."

That is where we all should be. As we close let me remind you of the Apostle Paul's words in Rom. 12:18,

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

Closing verses: Rom. 14:17-19.

## THE SACREDNESS OF MARRIAGE

Matthew 5:27-32

**Intro:** Why the Lord singled out the particular aspects of the Law which

He did, we can't say with any degree of authority. But it is important that we seek to understand what He had to say about each one. We saw in examining our Lord's words about the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," that He was showing that we can be guilty of violating that commandment even though we never actually murder anyone. I think that it can be said that most murders are premeditated, and that they have their roots in anger. I read that the boys who shot at the school bus down at the coast were angry with the driver because he had some part in getting a student expelled from school. We can all be very thankful that those boys were not successful in what they wanted to do, but you see they had murder in their hearts. Our Lord certainly did not mean that if you are angry, you might as well go ahead and kill the person against whom you are angry, but He did mean that we need to be very, very careful about harboring anger in our hearts toward anyone. The roots of murder are in an angry heart.

I don't know how prevalent murder was in those days, but it must have been fairly common for the Lord to use this example. You will remember that when the Lord was on trial before Pilate, the crowd chose a man who was a murderer to be released instead of our Lord.

Today murder has become something that we hear about almost daily, and sometimes more than one in a community. And let me say that a great part of the reason is due to the influence of the teaching of evolution in our schools. I think I mentioned to you last Sunday morning one thing that God said to Noah and his sons after the flood. Let me repeat it for you today. It is found in Gen. 9:6, and I want you to note in particular the last part of the verse:

Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.

That is not what our children are being taught these days – not only that "God made ... man," but that man was made "in the image of God." This was to be a deterrent against murder. When the Members of the Godhead created man, this is what they said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). And then this is what They did: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:27). *This set Adam and Eve apart from all of the other creatures. And this is the answer to evolution. Man*



*did not evolve from some lower form of life; he was created in the image of God* – and this applies to all people. Only Adam and Eve were created, but all of us came into this world “in the image of God.” So for anyone to commit murder is a sin against the triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. People may get by with it in our country, but nobody will get by with murder in the court of heaven.

The same truth applies to our text today. Our Lord spoke about *adultery*, and He spoke about *marriage*, and He spoke about *divorce*. These are all subjects that are very much in the news in our country today.

But now in dealing with subjects like this, we need to ask, “Where did marriage get started?” And the answer again is that it began with God. He made a man and a woman, and He was the One Who brought the woman, Eve, to the man, Adam. So it is perfectly right to say that *it was God Who performed the first marriage*. And God gave them the ability to have children, and so He told them to “be fruitful, and multiply” (Gen. 1:28). God did not create two men, and then tell them to be fruitful and multiply because that is not the way He planned for children to be conceived. Neither did He create two women, and tell them to be fruitful and multiply. And so according to God’s plan two men cannot make a family, neither can two women. Those are wicked perversions of God’s plan. He did not even give Adam two wives. He gave Adam only one wife. And so the account of creation in Genesis answers a lot of questions that people need to be asking today. And whenever men and/or nations have sought to change what God ordained, there is a big price to pay.

Anybody who reads the Bible is familiar with what I have been pointing out. But the problem today is that hardly anybody is reading the Bible. And yet if you read the Bible like you would read any other book, starting at the first, these are the very first things that you learn.

God’s plan for marriage has never changed. Men have tried to change it. Many men have had more than one wife, and often they have had more than one at the same time. But such relationships have always been displeasing to God – and they still are today! God is very patient, but we are seeing signs that His patience is running out as far as our country is concerned, and if people want to avoid the judgment of God, they had better get a Bible, start reading it, and bring their lives into line with what God has told us in His Word.

Now this brings us to our text for today.

## I. “THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY” (Matt. 5:27).

God created us. He is sovereign over us. He has every right to determine for us what is right and what is wrong, and among those things which He said are wrong, is murder. And another is adultery. And whoever violates God’s laws, falls under God’s judgment. Oh, people may get away with it for a time, but there comes a time when the judgment of God falls.

Now remember also that things can be legal, and still be wrong in God’s sight. And the name for anything that is wrong in God’s sight is *sin*. And any nation which legalizes, or permits, activity which is condemned by God, is going to pay a price for what is going on.

But what is adultery?

Adultery is when a boy and a girl, or a man and a woman, enter into an intimate relationship which God has indicated in His Word is only right after a man and a woman have been *married*. *Even if a man and a woman agree to have such a relationship, it is wrong in God’s sight. Under no circumstances is it right for unmarried people to have the relationship which God has ordained only for husbands and wives.*

*It is also adultery when a man who is married enters into a relationship with any woman who is not his wife, whether she is married or unmarried. And it is wrong for a woman who is married to have this relationship with any other man besides her husband.* Young people today have been led to think that they can do whatever they want to do, but to commit adultery is abominable in God’s sight, and it will always bring judgment when people continue on in it – if not now, it will come later. God will determine when.

This is one reason that the Bible tells us that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7), and also that it is “the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10). People are engaging today in all kinds of sinful activity because they don’t fear the Lord. And let me say that it doesn’t make a bit of difference whether or not you believe in God, or whether or not you believe in sin, there is a God and He has determined what is right and what is wrong. That is not for you and me to decide. God is the God of this universe, and He is the Judge. And so you and I had better be well acquainted with His Word so we will know what He says is right, and what He says is wrong. It is the turning point in anyone’s life when we learn the truth about God.

But let us go on to the next verse in our text. Here in verse 28 that Lord was not say that the only way you can commit adultery is by such a physical relationship with someone you are not married to, but He gave some added truth.

## II. THE LORD'S EXPLANATION OF THE COMMAND AGAINST ADULTERY (Matt. 28-30).

God not only demands purity of life, but there can be no real purity of life without purity of heart. So it is possible not to have committed the act of adultery, and yet to have committed adultery in one's heart. This often means that if the opportunity comes to commit adultery, and a person has been harboring such thoughts in his or her heart, the act may follow.

Many have pointed out the connection between this commandment against adultery (which is #7 in the ten commandments), and the tenth commandment which says, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife ... his manservant ... his maidservant ... his ox ... his donkey, nor anything that is thy neighbor's (Ex. 20:17).

The critical words in these verses are "lust" and "covet." It is possible for a man to think that a lady is attractive, or a woman to think a man is handsome, without lusting after that person. But we all need to be careful because it is easy for the Devil to take advantage of any situation, and our hearts are all inclined toward sin. So we all need to heed the warning. But to lust after a person of the opposite sex is *sin!* *God wants us to be "pure in heart."* *And you remember the promise in that Beatitude: "For they shall see God!"*

Then it is that the Lord spoke about the "right eye" and the "right hand."

Of the two eyes, the right was considered the more precious. And of the two hands, the right was considered the most valuable. Now to show that the Lord was not talking about tearing your right eye out, or actually cutting your right hand off, we all know that a person who has no right eye can still see out of his left eye, and a person who doesn't have a right hand, still has his left hand.

So what did the Lord mean?

Well, He was indicating that our eyes often see things which cause us to be tempted, and our hands are often the instruments which lead to sin. So

the Lord was saying that it would be better for us to lose an eye or a hand rather than to lose our “whole body” in “hell.” This is similar to another statement which our Lord made about salvation:

36 For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

37 Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mark 8:36-37).

It is often the sinful pleasures of this world that keep people from thinking about their souls. The love of money is the root of all evil, and many are so busy making money that they have no time to think about God, or their souls, or eternity – until it is too late! The pleasures of this life often, according to our Lord’s parable, choke out the Word, and a person is lost forever. Teen age involvement in adultery is leading millions of our young people straight down the path that leads to eternal doom.

So even if you haven’t actually committed adultery, be careful about what is going on in your heart. Be careful about what you look at in books, in magazine, on TV. And be careful about how you use your hands. Present the members of your body, which belongs to the Lord if you are really saved, and use your eyes and hands in a way that will please the Lord.

You see, the Bible teaches us things that we are not going to learn anyplace else! Don’t follow the crowd, or you will ruin your life, and spend eternity in hell.

Our text closes with:

### **III. OUR LORD’S WORD ABOUT DIVORCE (Matt. 5:31-32).**

Notice that we have the same pattern of speaking here that we had in verses 21 and 22, and then in verses 27 and 28 – with a slight variation. (Read.)

This word from our Lord does not actually have to do with one of the ten commandments, and yet in another sense it is related to the commandment we have just been considering – on adultery.

Marriage is a very, very sacred relationship. As some of our marriage ceremonies say, “It is not to be entered into lightly, but carefully, and prayerfully, and in the fear of God.” No decision we make is more important except regarding our salvation. The writer of Hebrews tells us that

“marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremonger and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4). And Solomon, speaking by the Holy Spirit, said in Prov. 18:22,

Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.

But there were divorces in the OT. This is what the Lord was referring to in verse 31. And He was referring to Deut. 24:1-4 which says,

1 When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.

2 And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife.

3 And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife;

4 Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

The conditions for a divorce were not very specific. However, we have this comment from our Lord during His ministry here on earth. You will find this in Mark 10:1-9:

1 And he arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judaea by the farther side of Jordan: and the people resort unto him again; and, as he was wont, he taught them again.

2 And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him.

3 And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you?

4 And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away.

5 And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.

6 But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.

7 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife;

8 And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh.

9 What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Now under the Law, God gave the men the opportunity to give their wives a bill of divorcement, but this was because of the hardness of their hearts. And it was God's original plan that those who were married should never be separated, except by death. But here He mentioned that adultery was the one reason a man and his wife could be divorced – but it does not mean that they had to be divorced if one or the other were unfaithful. But adultery is so terrible in God's sight that it is a basis for divorce –BUT, AS I HAVE SAID, IT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE! May the Lord keep us all from such a tragic event! However, if this has happened, or should happen, how wonderful it is to see a couple confess their sin to the Lord (because there are usually two sides to such a problem), be reconciled, and go on together with the Lord determined that by the grace of God such a thing shall not ever happen again.

**Concl:** This is a difficult subject to speak about, and I wondered if it would be proper on the Sunday that we are observing the Lord's Supper. But as I reflected upon this, I remembered that the Apostle Paul indicated in his instructions to the church at Corinth, and then on to us, that our time at the Lord's Table should include a time of self-examination. The Lord knows our hearts, and He knows, and we know, whether or not things are right in our lives. And perhaps this is a good time this morning for those of us who are married, to commit ourselves again to the Lord, praying that if there is any trouble between us and our spouses, that the Lord will forgive us and cleanse us and strengthen us that the Devil may not be able in any way to take advantage of us. And then let us eat the bread and drink from the cup to the glory of God, thanking the Lord that the same blood that saved us whenever it was that we were saved, is the same blood that cleanses us day by day from any defilement we have with any sin whatever it may be.

**HONESTY IN SPEECH**

Matthew 5:33-37

— **Intro:** When the Lord made the statement which we find in Matt. 5:20 He was setting the theme for all that we have in this first chapter of the the Sermon on the Mount. (Read Matt. 5:20.) The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, sad to say, was no guarantee that they were in the kingdom of heaven. Or, to state it another way, the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was no proof at all that they were saved.

This is a very sad thing that our Lord said about those who were supposed to be the spiritual leaders of the people of Israel in that day. To be sure, righteousness is required for salvation, but it is not the righteousness of men, but the righteousness of God! And such righteousness is not a righteousness produced by our works, but a righteousness which is ours through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been learning about the true righteousness in our study of Romans. Let me remind you of what Rom. 1:16-17 says:

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

— 17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

And we can add to this what the Apostle wrote in 2 Cor. 5:21. Speaking of what God had done for us in Christ, he said,

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:21).

So, after saying what the Lord said in verse 20 of this chapter, He went on to correct by His teaching the false teaching of the scribes and Pharisees by giving His disciples the truth.

Today we come to the third or the fourth abuse, depending upon how you arrange them. If you combine what the Lord said about adultery and divorce, as I have, then this is the third point. If you divide verses 27-30 from verses 31-32, then this is the fourth.

— What was the problem that the Lord was addressing here? Well, our first response to that question probably would be that it is against taking oaths. But a closer examination will show us that it is against the third commandment in the Law, against taking the Lord's Name in vain. And then when we ask why would the Lord's Name be taken as an oath, we can see that it

is to assure others that a person is really telling the truth. So we can say that this is the problem:

## I. THE SIN OF LYING.

We all know how prevalent this is in human life. We all are guilty, and we always as Christians have to be on our guard against being deceitful. It is a major sin, according to God.

If you have memorized the verses that we have in our Bible Memory work this winter, you know that one of our verses was Psa. 58:3:

The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.

And then remember Jer. 17:9:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

In Mark 7:21-23 we have those illuminating words from our Lord Jesus Christ:

- 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,
- 22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:
- 23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

And even as Christians we are warned against lying.

9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;

10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him (Col. 3:9-10).

In Eph. 4:25 we read these words:

Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

And then listen to these verses:

Prov. 12:22:

Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight.

Isa 59:2-4:

2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

3 For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers



with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness.

4 None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity.

Hosea 4:1-3:

1 Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.

2 By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood.

3 Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away.

John 8:44:

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

1 Tim. 4:1-2:

1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron.

Rev. 21:7-8:

7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

Rev. 22:14-15:

14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

15 For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers,

and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

So lying is unquestionably a major sin in the sight of God, and it is one of the greatest problems that we face every day. It is everywhere. No one is innocent of this great sin. We see it in business, in politicians, in broken marriages. No child ever needs to be taught to lie; it is a part of our nature.

But what is one measure that men use to try to show that they are not lying?

## II. THE USE OF OATHS (Matt. 5:33-36).

The Lord began here as he did in the preceding sections of His message, by referring to what had been said before. See verse 33.

“Forswear” means *to commit perjury, or to lie, or to swear falsely.*

One commentator made the following statement:

The Jews held that only oaths need be kept, and not all of them; only certain forms of swearing were binding. Christ [said] that such distinctions are iniquitous; all oaths are binding. But no oaths ought to be used, because a man’s word ought to be enough. Oaths and other strong statements have come into use because men are so often liars; but it is a grievous error to suppose that a lie is not sinful, unless it is sworn to. The Jews went even beyond this, and held that perjury was not sinful, unless the oath was taken in a particular form (Plummer, Alfred, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, pp. 82, 83).

As an example of this, let me read to you the words of the Lord Jesus in which He was denouncing the scribes and Pharisees for this very thing. His words are found in Matt. 23:16-22:

16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!

17 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?

18 And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.

19 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the

altar that sanctifieth the gift?

20 Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.

21 And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.

22 And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

Actually the statement made by our Lord is not found in exactly this form in the OT, but the gist of it is there in verses like Ex. 20:7:

Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

And Deut. 6:13:

Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.

And Lev. 19:12

And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.

Now the point both in the passage in Matt. 23 as well as in our text in Matt. 5, is that oaths were to be made as in the presence of the Lord, and not by Heaven, nor by the earth, nor by Jerusalem. Note how our Lord related all of these to God. And as far as swearing by our own heads, we cannot make one hair white or black. They probably dyed their hair in those days as some people do today, but the Lord was not talking about that. He meant permanently changing hair from white to black, or from black to white. We can't do that. But God certainly can.

So the people needed to remember that heaven is God's throne, the earth is His footstool, and Jerusalem is "the city of the great King," perhaps speaking here of the place where God dwells. So it is God who is being emphasized in each case. If we always remember that God sees us, and God hears us, and God knows what is in our hearts, then we will be careful about what we say and about what we promise to do.

I think that it is good to point out here that oaths are not always wrong. And we have examples in Scripture to prove this. When Abraham sent his servant to get a bride for Isaac, he made his servant swear that he would do what Abraham wanted him to do. See Gen. 24. Joseph made the children of Israel swear that they would take his bones with them when they returned to their own land. See Gen. 50. Joshua swore to the Gibeonites that he would let them live. See Joshua 9. And Saul was judged by

God later because he did not honor that oath. Jonathan made David swear that he would not cut off his kindness from Jonathan's house forever.

So good men have used the oath.

But what is even more significant is the fact that God has made oaths. He not only made the promise of salvation to Abraham, but He confirmed His promise with an oath. See Heb. 6:13-20. And we have the example of the Lord Jesus responding to the high priest when the Lord was standing trial before him. Listen to these words found in Matt. 26:63-64:

63 But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.

64 Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

The Lord did not rebuke the high priest for using God's Name in this way, but He responded to the high priest, confessing that He was the Son of God. Origen, who is remembered as "the celebrated Alexandrian Church teacher," and who lived in the second and third centuries, said that our Lord's "verily" was an oath.

So if you are called to witness in court that you will tell the truth, there is really no reason why you cannot do it. Living in a world like we live in, and with people as prone to lie as they are, this is one way of confirming that we intend to be, and will be, truthful.

And yet, for those of us who know the Lord, there is an even better way. Let me borrow words from the Apostle for my last heading.

### III. "A MORE EXCELLENT WAY" (Matt. 5:37).

We find this in verse 37. The Lord was indicating that every child of God should be known for his "honesty in speech." We should tell the truth whether we are under an oath or not. And our truthfulness should go down to the simplest of words. Our "yes" should always mean "yes," and we should never say "no" when the right answer is "yes" – or *vice versa*. And so we should never say "yes" when the right answer is "no." Our "yes" should always mean "yes," and our "no" should always mean "no."

We need to be known as honest people. This means that we are not going to cheat anyone. We are not going to take anything that does not belong to us. And we always seek to do what is right because:

- 1) We have been born again, and so are new creatures.
- 2) We know that the Lord is always watching us, and we want to do what is pleasing to Him.

At the end of verse 37 the Lord added these words: “For whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.” The Greek says, “from the evil,” and this has led many commentators to say that it should be translated, “from the Evil One.” This certainly fits in with what I read to you a little while ago from John 8:44. Let me read it to you again. The words are those of our Lord as he spoke to unbelieving Jews:

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (John 8:44).

The Devil lied to Eve, and in the following course of events, Adam sinned and the whole human race was brought under sin and under the judgment of God.

And so what did our Lord mean? Commentators seem to shy away from explaining this expression, “For whatsoever is more than these cometh of the Evil One.” I am not sure that I know, but I will tell you what I think our Lord meant. In the first part of verse 34, the Lord said, “But I say unto you, Swear not at all.” Putting these two verses together (34 and 37) it would seem that the Lord meant that we should be so intent on being honest before men, that they would know that a simple “yes” or “no” was even more dependable than if we had backed it up with an oath. The Devil does not want us to concentrate on being what God wants us to be; he would prefer that we join with the world in saying whatever we need to say in order to get by. Besides, when we take frivolous oaths, we run the danger of becoming hypocritical, and so would use the Name of our God in vain.

Perhaps James reference to this passage can help us. Listen to James 5:12: James 5:12

But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

**Concl:** Let us seek by the grace of God to be honest, never deceptive, not only in what we are, but also in what we say, and in all that we do – and even in our thoughts. And to God be all of the glory.

## THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Matthew 5:38-48

— **Intro:** We began our consideration of this Sermon on the Mount with what our Lord had to say about *the character of a child of God*. This, of course, is expanded in greater detail as we go on through the teaching of the NT, but some of the most basic characteristics of a child of God are given in the Beatitudes. And the Lord concluded His teaching of the Beatitudes by telling His disciples that they were “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” And He meant by this that when we manifest the characteristics that our Lord mentioned in the Beatitudes, we will have a positive and valuable influence on the people of this world who by nature live in an entirely different way.

The second thing that the Lord did was to mention that He did not come to destroy the Law which God had given to Moses, but He came to fulfill it. You will see this in Matt. 5:17. But, as I explained when we came to that verse, the Lord did not just say “law,” but He said, “the law, or the prophets.” And this was an expression, common among the Jews, which meant *all of the Old Testament*.

— But let me take you for a moment back to that word “fulfill” which the Lord used in Matt. 5:17. What did He mean when He used that word.

There is a very interesting use of this word in the passage from Romans which we had in our SS lesson last Sunday. Please turn with me to Rom. 15:18-20. It is there that the Apostle Paul used this same word which our Lord used. Let me read those three verses to you, and then I will point out where Paul used this word “fulfill.” (Read.)

18 For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed,

19 Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

20 Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation.

— The word “fulfill” is found in the last statement of verse 19, but here it is translated, “fully preached.” *This is exactly what our Lord was doing. He was explaining more fully the true meaning of the Old Testament.* The scribes and Pharisees sought to enforce the letter of the teaching of the

OT, but they knew little or nothing about the true meaning of Scripture. For example, they felt very smug if they had not actually killed someone, but they paid no attention to feelings of anger and hatred which were in their hearts, apparently unaware that these are the feelings that lead to murder. And you will remember that it was these scribes and Pharisees who had no hesitation about killing our Lord, and our Bibles tell us that even Pilate knew that it was because of the envy in their hearts that they wanted to have the Lord crucified. After he had asked whether they wanted Christ or Barabbas to be set free, and they wanted Barabbas, we read this about Pilate: "For he knew that for envy they had delivered him" (Matt. 27:18). The Jews had no concern for the envy that was in their hearts, but it was their envy which led to their murder of the Lord Jesus.

That is why the Lord was explaining various matter in the Old Testament to His disciples, and informing them that their righteousness had to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees if they expected to be saved. It was not that they were saved by works, but he meant that a truly saved person will not only be concerned about certain sins, but also with the sins which lead to greater sins. So our Lord was *fully preaching* the message of the Old Testament.

Now let us turn to our text for today.

We have seen that there are *six times* in this chapter that the Lord said something like this: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time," and then He followed that with, "But I say unto you." You will see this in:

- 1) Vv. 21, 22.
- 2) Vv. 27, 28.
- 3) Vv. 31, 32.
- 4) Vv. 33, 34.
- 5) Where we are today: vv. 38, 39.
- 6) Vv. 43, 44.

Today I am going to take us the last two, as I did with 2) and 3) because they have a relationship with each other. Vv. 38-42 have to do with getting even with those who do something wrong against us, and vv. 43-48 have to do with the way we are to treat our enemies. Actually, verse 48 has to do not only with this last matter that the Lord took up, but with all that He had said from the beginning of this message. But we will come to that at the end of the message today. Now let us look at this fifth section which we have in verses 38 to 42. And you can be sure that the disciples would not find what our Lord was teaching here exemplified in the lives

or the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees. The first of these last two has to do with the OT command:

— **I. “AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH (Matt. 5:38-42).**

The command to which the Lord was referring is found in Ex. 21:24-25:

- 24     Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,
- 25     Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

The purpose of laws like this was twofold:

- 1) It was to help the people understand what sin was.
- 2) It was given for the purpose of restraining sin by declaring what the consequences, or punishment, would be.

As far as the scribes and Pharisees were concerned, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said that they made two mistakes. They tended to forget that decisions of this nature were to be decided by judges, and not by individuals for themselves. And, secondly, they were insistent that this be observed to the letter. They were like many people today who insist on having their own rights. They were not interested at all in restraining people from taking full advantage of the Law. And that was one major point where our Lord differed from the scribes and Pharisees.

We need to be careful about making more of this than our Lord intended. When the Lord said, “Resist not evil,” He was not saying that nations should not have armies, nor that cities should not have police. He was not saying that parents should not protect their children. Instead, He was speaking of personal offences which we all experience at one time or another.

Furthermore, the Lord was seeking to teach His disciples to be unselfish. There is such a tendency for all of us to forget that we don’t have anything that the Lord has not given us. And more than that, what He gives to us is not really ours, but it still belongs to Him, and we are to use what He gives us for His glory by doing with it what will be pleasing to the Lord. Even our time belongs to the Lord.

— In our Bible reading for yesterday we concluded reading 1 Chronicles. In those chapters we see how the people of Israel gave for the construction of the temple. They brought an abundance of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood, and even their precious stones. And they all gave willingly! This is what



is so pleasing to the Lord. After the offering was made, David led in a prayer of praise, and, among other things, this is a part of his prayer:

11 Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all.

12 Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all.

13 Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name.

14 But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee (1 Chron. 29:11-14).

What a happy day it is in all of our lives when we learn this! Of course, we are to take care of the things that the Lord gives us, but all that we have is the Lord's, and all that we have is to be used for His glory.

One of the most self-destructive practices of this present day is the way we are taught to insist upon our rights. It makes people even more selfish, and if we live this way it makes us demand our rights even when we are making it hard for other people for us to take what we want. But let us remember this concerning the Sermon on the Mount: The Lord was speaking to His disciples, and He was teaching them how believers are to live. No unbeliever is going to find it in his heart to live according to Scripture. It is only after we are saved that we see the wisdom of doing God's will even when it causes us to make ourselves the servants of others.

We still need our armies, and we certainly need our policemen and firemen. And we must defend our homes against all intruders. There is nothing wrong with having a burglar alarm in your home, and even on your car. But, at the same time, where legitimate needs exist in the lives of others, it is for us to help where we can. People don't always go to the extremes that are mentioned in this passage, but if they do, we need to consider going even beyond their requests. It is from verse 21 that the expression comes, *going the second mile*.

But now let us go on to the second part of our text: verses 43-48.

## II. "LOVE YOUR ENEMIES" (Matt. 5:43-48).

The scribes and Pharisees taught that the Jews were to hate their enemies, and there was certain justification for this from the Old Testament although there is no such commandment given in the OT – that they were to love their neighbors, but hate their enemies. Now the scribes and Pharisees taught that other Jews were their neighbors, and that all Gentiles were their enemies.

You can see how they would feel this way living under Rome, and because of the way the Jews had suffered throughout their history under Gentile nations, *e.g.*, the Egyptians, the Babylonians, etc. Also they were told in Deut. 23 some strong words about the Ammonites and the Moabites. Listen to these words:

3 An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever:

4 Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee.

5 Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee.

6 Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever (Deut. 23:3-6).

Also, when the children of Israel entered the land of Canaan, they were told to kill everyone.

So there was much evidence for what the scribes and Pharisees taught, but they took a truth that applied to certain circumstances, and made a general law out of it – which the Lord never intended to be done!

But what did the Lord say? See verse 44. (Read.)

What would be the objective? It would be to make friends out of those who were enemies. But it was not to make friends just to have friends. It was to make friends for their own benefit, that through the kindness of those who believe, those who formerly were enemies might be saved!

But how does this come about? Verse 45 tells us. “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.” The verb “be” which our Lord used here *lit.* means *to become*. It does not mean that we become the

children of God by what we do toward our enemies, *but that this is what we become in their eyes because this is not the usual way that enemies treat each other.* So again we see how different the life of a child of God is from the people of the world.

The Apostle Paul picked up on this truth in his letter to the church at Rome when he wrote the words we find in Rom. 12:19-21:

19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

But the Lord Jesus made another point, and this is what covers all that we have learned from Matthew 5. I am referring to verse 48. (Read.)

You see, the kind of a life that our Lord was portraying was descriptive of God Himself – and we know that if it described our heavenly Father, it is descriptive also of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 45 with what it says about the sun and the rain, is partial evidence of the character of God. And so are verses like Rom. 5:7-10:

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

And what about praying for our enemies? Could we have any greater illustration that our Lord's prayer from the Cross as He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). That was surely a prayer for His enemies.

**Concl:** Such behavior as our Lord was describing in these two sections we have been considering today, is only possible by the grace of God. It is completely foreign to what man is by nature. When people do things to us which we don't like, it is only natural for us to get back at them in the

same way, or even worse. And we are inclined to be glad when something bad happens to someone who has been our enemy. But all of that is apart from the grace of God. When we are saved, we begin to have an eternal perspective to what we think and what we do. We see people as eternal souls, doomed to spend eternity in hell, of rescued by the grace of God, and destined for heaven. God knows what He is doing in every life, but it is a part of His plan to use those who have been saved to reach those whom He intends to save. And the more our lives show that God is our heavenly Father, and that the Lord Jesus Christ is our Savior, the greater our effectiveness will be as *the children of our Father Who is in heaven*.

*So verse 48 tells us what Matthew 5 is saying to each one of us. We need to be "perfect" as our Father in heaven is "perfect."*

The tense of the verb "be" in this last verse of the chapter is future. And so lit. it could be translated, *And ye [emphatic] shall be perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is now perfect*.

Some day we will be completely perfect as God is, but until that day we are to be making daily progress in that direction. We will never make perfection in this life, but the work of God in our hearts will be complete the moment we see our blessed Lord. Until then, we must say what the Apostle said to the Philippian church in the epistle he wrote to them:

12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

15 Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

16 Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing (Phil.3:12-16).

God never asks us to do anything but what He will enable us to do what He says. And so, as difficult and even impossible as this life seems from what we have already learned in this Sermon on the Mount, let us take our Lord at His Word, and believe that by His grace we can be what He tells us to be, and that our lives can show His glory even in this sinful world.