

"A New Way of Living" (Matthew 5:1-7:29)

Turn in your Bibles to **Matthew 5**.

SERMON INTRODUCTION: As many of you know, the NT begins with four separate accounts of the life and death of Jesus. And in those accounts we see Jesus from many different perspectives. One very important perspective, that the Apostle Matthew especially emphasizes, is that Jesus was a teacher - he came to teach, and there's no passage in all of Scripture that gives as much insight into His teaching as the passage we are considering this morning (and that we will be considering over the next several weeks). There's *probably also, no teaching of Jesus' in all of Scripture that is more misunderstood* and *misinterpreted than this passage*. So it's important, before we dive into the particular details of this passage, to take a general look at the whole thing, so that we see it in the right context. If we don't do that, then we're in danger of "*missing the wood for the trees*," which is the problem so often encountered with this passage - which is often called "the Sermon on the Mount."

I am not going to read through the SotM this morning, although I will be outlining it and referring to some specific passages. I had considered reading through different selections of it, but that breaks it up too much, and as we will see, it's really intended to be taken here in its entirety. I would encourage you later this afternoon, and maybe once more before we get to it next week, to read through the Sermon a couple of times so that you get a holistic picture of it. It is chapters 5, 6 & 7.

(Full text of passage not read due to its length)

How do you live your life once you've undergone a complete and total change in perspective? I watched a video recently about a man by the name of **Otis Johnson**, who had just gotten out of prison after having been there for 44 years. He went to jail when he was 25 years old....and he was released when he was 69 years old. And on the video, he was talking about his experiences when he got out. He said it was like a whole new world. *People were walking around with wires stuck in their ears* - he said they looked like they were all CIA agents. *Pay-phones were a quarter when he went in*, but almost non-existent when he got out. He noticed as he looked around, that the

drinks that he saw were in all sorts of different colors. He was overwhelmed by all the choices he had to make. He said that in prison, someone else determined when the lights would go on, and when they'd be turned off. Meals happened when they said they would, and he was floored by all the choices as he went through a grocery store.

For Otis, when he got out of prison, the whole world had changed....and so he had to learn how to live in a brand new world - he was seeing everything from a different perspective than he had before. And we have to RECOGNIZE that this passage that we're beginning to go through - the SotM, is written to a people who see things from a completely different perspective - a different perspective than they had before, and a different perspective than the rest of the world has. And IF we don't recognize that, then we will come away with a completely WRONG understanding of it, as many people have. It HAS to be seen through the right lens - and that lens is that of a change that has taken place INSIDE - it's not so much that the world has changed (like we saw with Otis)....but anyone who has come to know Christ have changed...into a different person, and so that you see things differently. This is how we need to read and understand the SotM. We start off life, and for some of us, we may live for many, many years, going through our lives with ONE PERSPECTIVE on everything - on our relationships with other people, on the priorities that we have in our lives, on the things that we want and desire, a certain perspective on how we view rules and regulations...the LAW, a certain perspective on marriage, a certain perspective on our enemies, those who are against us, a certain perspective on our RIGHTS - the things that are owed to us. THEN, a change happens so that we gain a completely NEW PERSPECTIVE. That is that we see things differently then we did before. A new perspective on all those things...on relationships with other people, on priorities, on the things we want and desire, a new perspective on the law, and on the RIGHTS that we have. The key is that we begin to think differently, and we want different things, all of this because there is a change that God has brought about within us.

That's really what Matthew had been describing at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Recall the words with which he began his ministry - he said, "**Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.**"

And then in 4:23, it said that Jesus “**went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the GOOD NEWS of the Kingdom.**” *Do you see what he's talking about here?* The people have been living their lives one way...under ONE KINGDOM, that has completely governed their hearts, and therefore, determined their actions - over their relationships, way of looking at the Law...over everything. It was all governed by this one KINGDOM; and **THEN Jesus enters into the world, and He brings another KINGDOM**, in which there is a completely different rule. And there are SOME PEOPLE whose eyes were opened, and they said - that's something I WANT, that's something I NEED. I've been going the WRONG direction all this time. And what's happening is that there's a CHANGE that is taking place within them AT THAT POINT, *so that they come to Jesus with a heart that's been prepared for living under this new Kingdom rule (and that's something that we've already seen in the disciples that came, dropped everything, and followed Him).* Notice - **this is not something that's been forced on them**, but because they've been radically changed inside - it's something they WANT. BUT at the same time, all they've known is this OLD way of living...a way that's completely foreign to this new Kingdom. And *so they need to be taught how to live under this new rule.* And THAT is what the Sermon on the Mount is all about. It's all about “**How to live your life when Xp has brought a completely different RULE to reign over your heart.**” And it applies to every single person who comes to Christ...every single person who has come to experience this change inside. You've been living one way...under one RULE., and you need to be **TAUGHT** how to live in this NEW WAY, under the NEW RULE.

This is something that doesn't just happen - you've been living your life for so long in one way, and you may begin to hate that way of living, but you need to be taught about the new way. **The problem is that the old patterns, and the old ways, can remain ingrained in us.** I remember from my time in the Navy, there were men who had spent so much of their career out on a ship with a bunch of guys, that they didn't really know how to come back to and to live with their wives and their children - it was hard to change the patterns that had become ingrained in them, and often, without counseling, a broken family would result. The same can be true if you've been in prison for many years, like Otis

was. And the same is true about the Christian - Xp has brought a completely different RULE to reign over the heart, but we so often are apt to continue in the same patterns...very much as if we're still serving our OLD MASTER. And so here, Jesus says, "You've been changed. This, therefore, is how you shall live."

There are three simple questions we need to ask of his sermon, so that we can understand it before we dig into the details. They are "WHO? WHAT? and HOW?" **1) WHO does the sermon apply to?** **2) WHAT is the teaching in the sermon?** **3) HOW does a person DO these things?**

1. WHO does the sermon apply to? This is critical to understand - it's where most people seem to go wrong with the sermon. Who is the PRIMARY audience for this teaching. This is given to us in the first few 10 or 11 verses...commonly called the Beatitudes. We'll be looking at this in more detail next week, so for now I'll just touch on it briefly - but as I do, we'll see that this describes THE only person who is capable of living out the teaching in the SotM. And if you look closely, you'll see it's describing the essential character attributes of a Christian - a follower of Christ.

In vv. 1 & 2, we see that Jesus is speaking to the disciples here, and He says - "Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...the merciful...the pure in heart...the peacemakers...those who are persecuted for righteousness sake." These aren't character traits that are held up by the world. But what are they? They describe a person who has been emptied of their own strength, and of their own goodness and self-righteousness. It's a person who cares about sin...they mourn over it, and someone who has come to depend upon the Lord...not upon themselves - we hear this echoed in Paul's words, when he says in Phil 4:12, "**I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.**" He doesn't have a strength of his own....his strength is found in Xp (and Him alone).

Notice that Jesus here is saying to his disciples...that is, to all those who have followed Xp, that his Kingdom is not something that is merely EXTERNAL, BUT that at its core, it's something SPIRITUAL - it is “within you” - something that governs your mind and your heart and your actions. And here's the key from this - that the SotM is NOT saying “DO THIS....behave in this way, and you will become a Christian....or, you will draw closer to God,” BUT, it is saying, “BECAUSE you are THIS...BECAUSE you are a CHRISTIAN...BECAUSE these characteristics describe who you are.....LIVE LIKE THIS.”

This is where so much teaching on the SotM has gone astray. For one, it has been separated from the Beatitudes, and it's often taught as a code of moral ethics for how ALL PEOPLE should live - Jesus taught that THIS is good, so live like THIS, and it will go well for you. So that when it says in 5:39, **“Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also,”** this has been twisted into a teaching of pacifism for all people - all people need to give up their weapons, and just “love one another.” That's not the teaching at all. The SotM is NOT a teaching for all people. It can't possibly be.

Jesus describes it like the difference between two fruit trees. You'd never expect an apple tree to be able to produce oranges, no matter how you take care of it, you fertilize it, keep it temperature controlled - it's never going to produce oranges...and likewise, an orange tree could never produce apples. There is a difference that runs that deep - it's not just a difference of degree. The SotM is given to those who have been changed to the core - to those who have been emptied of themselves....the poor in spirit, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness....SO THAT - they can be filled of the Spirit.

Notice also that this does not just apply to SOME Christians - there are no divisions that are made here. There is a tendency to take the SotM and apply it to “super-Christians,” and all others are somewhere further back. This is a distinction that's never found in Scripture, and Jesus doesn't make it here.

So before you ever get to the specific commands and injunctions of the sermon, you need to look at these first 11 verses, and ask character questions - **“Do I recognize my spiritual poverty? Am I**

concerned about my pride issues? Am I dependent upon the Lord? Do I at least recognize my need to turn frequently to this Word, because I know my way is NOT the right way?" "Am I less and less saying, 'I can do it myself,' and more and more bringing every situation to the Lord in prayer?"

The more we are able to give a "YES" answer to those questions, the more we are prepared...then...to take the teaching of the Sermon, and to live by it. That's the first and most fundamental question for us - "How do we fit with these first 10 verses?" They describe a person with a changed perspective that can only be brought about by God...This is the answer to the "WHO" question - WHO does the sermon apply to?

(*The next question is "WHAT"...*)

2. WHAT is the teaching in the sermon? Does Xp's teaching here consist of several rules for us to obey? Is it like a NT version of the Ten Commandments, that the Christian needs to obey that goes beyond what Israel, from the OT, had to obey? The key here, in answering that question, is that this comes from a changed perspective - so that it's all about showing how a person is to live, in all areas of their life, after having been TRANSFORMED by the grace of God.

Just to touch on a few of the areas of life that are shown - first, in **5:17 to the end of the chapter**, Jesus addresses the part that the LAW plays in His New Kingdom. He makes it clear that the Christian is a person who is concerned about keeping God's Law. But it seems that what is important here is not merely the letter of the law...it's not just something EXTERNAL, but the spirit of the Law. This is a person who knows the grace and mercy of God, and so He has a deep desire to follow the INTENT and the SPIRIT of the Law.

In chapter 6, we see a renewed perspective on doing GOOD WORKS. It's not for the praise of others, or for other external rewards...it COMES out of love for the Father, and because of the rewards that come from Him. Jesus says that a transformed person is one who learns how to pray and how to fast, and one who lives in total dependence upon the Father, free from dependence upon worldly things. He says in 6:19, "**Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust**

destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”

This whole chapter is all about living in the presence of God, in submission to him, and dependence upon Him - and what that looks like in daily experience.

And then **ch. 7** begins with how a transformed person views the judgment of God, and it ends by saying that “**everyone who hears these words and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on a rock,” so that it was able to withstand all the testing that comes against it.**

Notice that what we’re given in these 3 chapters is not so much a list of commandments - of what must be DONE, but it’s more a description of “who a Christian IS.” This is who you are....so live out of who you already are. He’s not giving ways of thinking and behaviors that are foreign, but they are a natural part of who you are. It’s like when a child graduates High School - what do we say? “**Don’t continue to live like a child...you have everything you need to live responsibly. I’m only asking you to live out of WHO YOU ARE!**” That’s what we’re told in the SotM, and that should change our way of thinking about it. If we feel weight on our shoulders as we look through these chapters, as if this is a heavy burden - then we need to recognize that there’s something in our understanding - this is not a set of commandments to achieve, but the life we are called to live, out of who we are in Christ.

(That leads us to the 3rd question, which is “HOW”...)

3. HOW does a person DO these things? This IS the troubling question for many, because the SotM seems so difficult to achieve. That’s where we need to know that it is founded upon a work of God.

You’ll see that in the Beatitudes, if you really study them. You’ll notice the primary characteristic that stands out is that there is a weakness on the part of man, so that all strength and power and wisdom, must come from GOD. And this is the foundation beneath the whole SotM, and beneath life in the Kingdom of God. It’s all a response. **Eph 2** describes it well. You’ve got a person who has been living their life on their own...completely DEAD to God. That’s what it says - “**You were DEAD in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the**

prince of the power of the air.” It’s speaking about the other Kingdom in which we all once lived.

Then it says those important words - “**BUT GOD, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive with God.”**

We are so used to relying upon ourselves, that it's hard for us to think in terms of relying upon God. That's why our **prayer lives** are so weak. It's like the Israelites when they were being led out of Egypt, and they saw the way God destroyed Pharaoh, and the way that he led them through the parted waters of the Red Sea, and how he led them through the wilderness - they SAW that he took care of them, that they weren't missing even one thing that they REALLY NEEDED. They SAW HIS POWER - yet, they still failed to trust Him, and to rely upon Him.

We are so used to relying upon ourselves - *our OLD WAYS are so ingrained in us, that we fail to see that He gives us New POWER. It's HIS DOING....not ours!* He places His HOLY SPIRIT within us, and gives us HIS power. **Eph 2** goes on to say, “**For it is by GRACE you have been saved, through faith. And this is NOT YOUR OWN doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**” And then it goes on.... “**For we are HIS workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**”

And that IS the SotM - that's what it's all about...it's about who we ARE in Xp - “**We are HIS workmanship, created in Xp Jesus for good works...**” - prepared by God, “that we should walk in them.” SO - “HOW” do we do what may seem so difficult in this teaching? Out of a complete and total dependence upon God. We no longer do it in our OLD ways.

Think about your own life - “Do you live it in a dependence upon Him?” “Do you recognize that HE provides all that you need to live as He calls you to live? Are you in a place in which you really BELIEVE His words in **chap. 7:7 - “ASK, and it will be given to you; SEEK, and you will find; KNOCK, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks RECEIVES, and the one who seeks FINDS, and to the one who knocks it will be OPENED.”** Do you live daily in humble reliance upon Him? And do you therefore take this SERMON seriously - as something which is meant to be lived...and as something which you have been given the POWER to live?

CONCLUSION: We are a people who claim to believe that the Son of God has come into this world, and that He has sent His own Spirit to us...to bring about **a radical transformation within us**, and to then **give us His absolute power** to live out the life that He has called us to - the life that is described in the Sermon on the Mount. **This is given to a people who have a CHANGED PERSPECTIVE!** Jesus came, and lived, and died, and rose again, and sent the Holy Spirit IN ORDER THAT you and I....might live as we are taught in the Sermon on the Mount. This is the radical hope that we cling to....and which IS ours in Xp. May He be glorified!