

Sermons on Matthew 5-7-Lowell Johnson

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Happy Are The Humble Matt. 5:1-3

The Beatitudes give us God's blueprint for real happiness.

-We live in an unhappy world. We live in a world where many are struggling with pain and misery and disease and famine and flood. There is the fear of being killed by a terrorist bullet or bomb. Families and marriages are being destroyed by conflict and divorce. This world has a lot of unhappiness, but the Beatitudes give to us God's plan for happiness in an unhappy world.

Let me give you the setting for our Lord's great Sermon on the Mount.

-Go back to Matt. 4:23. In this verse we see the three main aspects of Christ's public ministry; that of teaching, preaching, and healing. Notice which aspect is listed first: Teaching!

-Notice 5:2- "He opened His mouth and TAUGHT them saying." This is really the "Teaching on the Mount."

Notice that Jesus saw the multitudes, but instead of going to the multitudes, He went up into a mountain and "His disciples came unto Him."

-Many wanted to come to Him to be healed or to see folks healed, but when he started teaching, the crowd thins out.

Notice that Jesus sat down to teach. If a rabbi spoke while standing, his words were considered informal. When he sat down, it signified that he was ready to give an authoritative, important, significant teaching.

As Jesus seated Himself and got ready to teach the people, He looked into their faces and beyond their faces and into their hearts. He saw people who were religious, but their lives were monotonously humdrum. Religion for them was little more than superstition and meaningless ceremony. They were disappointed with life and wondered if the words of this new Teacher would actually make any difference in their search for real meaning in life.

-What Jesus saw in the hearts of those people that day suggested to Him the theme for His teaching. He must have thought to himself, "Every heart here is in search of happiness, but most of them don't know where to find real, lasting happiness."

-The audience Jesus faced 2,000 years ago is very close akin to the audience He would face today if He came to our city and our church.

-The first word of our Lord's message was "Happy." He tells them how to be happy. The things He told them 2,000 years ago is what He would tell us today. The principles of happiness haven't changed.

-He gives eight principles of happiness. The first Beatitude is the foundation and the other seven are like building blocks. Each one of them builds on the one before it.

-Happiness begins with an absolute commitment to Christ.

It is important to realize that the focus of the Beatitudes is not on "Doing" but on "Being". These are attitudes that are to BE in our lives. They do not so much define a set of actions to us as they describe a kind of character. This is not the "Do – attitudes"; they are the "Be – attitudes."

It isn't hard to pick up on the theme of the Beatitudes. The word "Blessed" is repeated in each Beatitude.

-Some translate the word "Blessed" as "happy" or "happiness." The meaning of the word goes much deeper than that. Our English word "happiness" contains the root "hap," which means "chance" or "change". Human happiness is something that depends on the chances or changes of life, something which life may give or destroy. The world's idea of happiness is very temporary. Let me give you an example.

Every year two Mississippi football teams play in what they call, The Egg Bowl. Fifty thousand will drive to the stadium where the game is played, and all 50,000 of them are happy as they get to the stadium. They're excited. They're going to watch their team play. They're going to drink lots of cokes and eat lots of sandwiches and have tailgate parties and see friends and renew old acquaintances. It's going to be wonderful. Everybody is happy when they go, but I want to tell you, half of them will be unhappy when the game is over and the drive home for them will be a long one!

-Jesus is not talking about temporary thrill here. Jesus is talking about a deep, inward, abiding joy. It is an inward contentedness that is not affected by circumstances.

-The Greek word "makarios" doesn't even apply to human emotions. Rather, it applies to inner contentment, satisfaction, and inner peace.

-But it goes deeper than that. It's a statement of how God views people who live a certain way. The root idea of "blessed" is "approved by God."

By normal human standards, such things as humility, mourning, suffering, desire for righteousness, mercy, and being persecuted are not the stuff of which happiness is made. To the natural man such happiness sounds like misery!

Here is what Jesus means. Here is how God views people who live a certain way: God applauds the poor in spirit. He cheers the mourners. He favors the meek. He smiles upon the hungry. He honors the merciful. He welcomes the pure in heart. He claps for the peacemakers. He rises to greet the persecuted.

-The real question is, How much do you want God's approval?

Three things I want to share with you:

I. The Meaning of Being Poor in Spirit – 5:3

What does Jesus mean when He says that we are to be “poor in spirit?”

1. Jesus does not mean, “Blessed are the Poor”.

There is nothing about being poor that makes you right with God or closer to God. Jesus never said that being poor is a blessing.

-Poor people can be just as materialistic as rich people. No man is necessarily blessed simply because he is poor; nor is any man necessarily blessed because he is rich.

-Jesus is not talking about the materially poor. If that were true, Jesus would have never told us to help lift the burdens of the poor or destitute or hungry or those left homeless by natural calamities.

2. Jesus does not mean, “Blessed are the Poor OF Spirit” or the “Poor Spirited”.

There is nothing blessed about a poor-spirited person – one who lacks drive, motivation, or has no enthusiasm for life. I've never seen a happy critical, negative, down-on-everything person

3. Jesus is not talking about one who has a low self-worth.

“Oh, I'm just a worm.” “I'm not worth much.” “Poor old me!”

-I think of the spies who came back to Moses and said, “We can't take the Promised Land. There are giants in the land and we look like grasshoppers.” Or, the man who received one talent who buried it in the ground.

Well, then, what does Jesus mean by the “Poor in Spirit?”

It is not by accident that Jesus puts this beatitude first because humility is the foundation of all other graces and a basic element is becoming a Christian.

-If I were to ask you what one sinful attitude is most responsible for keeping people from coming to Jesus Christ to be saved, what attitude would you name? I think it is the attitude of Pride! It is spiritual – self – sufficiency. It is the attitude that we can stand before God as acceptable in His sight on the basis of what we ourselves are or can do or have done.

We have been taught all our lives to be independent. An inner voice says, “Prove it to them! You can do it. You don't need anybody's help. You can do it all by yourself.”

-That attitude may be fine in some areas of life, but it is never fine when it comes to spiritual things. Nothing keeps you from salvation like pride!

There are many biblical references to being poor in spirit. Isaiah 66:2; Ps. 34:18

The word Jesus used for “poor” describes absolute and abject poverty. Being poor in spirit means to be broken in spirit; to be beaten to our knees; to be bankrupt spiritually; to be helpless spiritually; it is to realize that in ourselves, we have no good thing to offer a Holy God; that all our goodness and righteousness is in God's sight, filthy rags; that we are all sinners, unclean and undone before God.

-Not only that, but we are powerless to do anything about our problem. We are in need of God's help. If God does not step in, we will die in our sins!

-If you feel the pain of your own depravity before a holy God so badly that you want to do something about it; congratulations, you are poor in spirit. Only then can you receive help.

In Matt. 5:3, Jesus describes the theological concept of “conviction.” Conviction means to bring to light, to expose someone's sin before the Lord, to be conscious of your sinfulness and lostness.

-The whole emphasis is on God's marvelous grace. It is something God does for the person who confesses his poverty and relies wholly upon God and His provision.

Before we can be saved or be used of God, we must be humble. Rom. 3:10, 23

-Once we are saved, we are useless to God when we are proud. I Peter 5:5-6; James 4:10

II. The Marks of Being Poor in Spiritually

Let me give you some marks of humility:

1. A humble person prays. His dependence is on God.

2. A humble person is thankful.

3. A humble person builds others up.

Three illustrations of being poor in spirit:

1. Luke 18:9-14 (Note v. 9 "who trusted in themselves that they were righteous.")

The self-righteous Pharisee felt good about himself. He was impressed with his own accomplishments and boastfully recommended himself to God.

-The other man felt his shortcomings and was depressed over his sins and pleaded for God's mercy.

-One man was saved and the other lost. It wasn't the "good" man who was saved. He ended up lost. The "bad" man ended up saved.

-Did you know it's not nearly as important the way you come to church as it is the way you go out of church? We spend a lot of time preparing to come to church, don't we? We have our hair dryers, hair spray, toothpaste, and that's important, but it's humility God looks for.

2. Luke 15:11-32 The prodigal son said, "Father, I have sinned and am not worthy to be called your son." The Elder brother said, "I have never transgressed your law and I never got a party!"

3. John 13 Only the humble Jesus was willing to wash feet.

Here's a mark of a mature Christian: He sins less and less, but confesses more and more.

III. The Motive for the Poor In Spirit

"For theirs IS the Kingdom of heaven." Not just in the future, but NOW! It is the territory of God's rule.

-Entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven is by the new birth – Matt. 18:3-4

-Luke 17:20-21

Nothing in my hand I bring

Simply to Thy cross I cling;

Naked, came I for Thee to dress,

Helpless, fly to Thee for grace

Foul, I to the fountain fly.

Wash me, Savior, or I die.

Happy Are The Hurting Matt. 5:1-4

I can almost see Jesus, sitting upon a large rock, teaching those who are seated upon the ground. He opened His mouth to teach and the first word He speaks is "Blessed"- happy. He could see on their faces and in their hearts that they were unhappy, disappointed with life, and discouraged about their future. They were interested in being happy, so they perked up their ears to see what He would say.

-But when He said, "Happy are the poor in spirit," that was the very opposite of what they thought would bring happiness, contentment, and peace to their souls. But the first "must" to being happy is to recognize our spiritual poverty and receive the riches of Christ's forgiveness as we allow Him to wash away our sins in His precious blood.

Now Jesus speaks again - "Blessed – Happy are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

-"Did you hear what that rabbi said?" a man in the crowd scoffed to his friend. "Happy are those who mourn? If happiness and mourning go together, then we Jews must be in heaven!"

-Do happiness and mourning go together? What a paradox! Everything in our world opposes that principle. The world says, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." The world says, "Laugh, and the world laughs with you; weep, and you weep alone."

Who in their right mind would think of congratulating a person whose face was wet with tears? "It is nice to see you crying today, Mary. Keep it up. It's good for you."

Jesus said, "Blessed are they that mourn;" we say, "Blessed are the tearless." But He persisted in pronouncing a blessing on the mourners.

Do you remember Father Damien who was a missionary to the lepers for thirteen years on the Island of Molokai? For thirteen years he was their teacher and companion and friend. Finally, he caught the dreaded disease. At first he was not aware of it, but one morning he spilled some boiling water on his foot. "How Painful!" you say. No, there was not the slightest pain. It was then that he knew...he knew he, too, was infected. The loss of sensitivity was proof that leprosy had conquered.

-But there is something far sadder than loss of physical sensitivity. It is the loss of spiritual sensitivity. When we become insensitive to the sin in our lives; when our consciences have been so seared that they no longer react to sin and we are past feeling, as Paul says, we are in a dangerous position. As a child of God our consciences are supposed to hurt when we sin. It's how God alerts us to our need for repentance.

-What about you? When you sin, does your conscience trouble you? If you can say, "Yes," then be glad! Happy are they who mourn over wrongdoing, for they are truly alive. But if you can sin, and repeat the sin and it not bother you and break your heart, don't rejoice over that. You are headed for spiritual ruin.

"Blessed are those whose hearts break because of having sinned before God, for they shall be comforted by the forgiving grace of God."

-The desired characteristic in every Christian ought to be a feeling of deep sorrow and great concern for sin and increasing gratitude to God for His willingness to forgive. To be assured of pardon is to know genuine comfort within your soul.

I. The Meaning of Mourning – Mt 5:4

If you want to know a person's character, find out what makes him laugh and what makes him weep.

-What we laugh at and what we weep over indicates our values of life. Some people have the idea that weeping is a sign of weakness. Self-pity is a sign of weakness, but not weeping. Jesus Christ was the strongest man who ever walked on this earth, and He wept openly!

There are nine words in the Bible translated mourn, weep, grief or tears. Some mourning is improper; some is proper; some is Godly.

1. Improper mourning

1 Kings 21 When Naboth refused to give King Ahab his family vineyard, Ahab became "sullen and displeased" and lay on his bed with his face to the wall and would not eat. Jezebel said, "Don't cry, Big Boy, I'll get the vineyard for you" and she had Naboth killed. That's improper weeping.

2 Sam. 13 David's son Amnon mourned because he couldn't have his half-sister, Tamar, because she was a virgin; so, he raped her. That's improper mourning.

2. Proper mourning

There are times when grief and mourning are completely appropriate. God has given us the ability to cry as a pressure valve that helps us vent our emotions and enable us to heal.

-When Abraham's wife, Sarah, died, Abraham wept for her – Gen. 23.

-Jesus wept when His friend Lazarus died. John 11

3. Godly mourning

The word Jesus uses in Matt. 5:4 is the strongest Greek word for mourning. It means to mourn as one mourns for the dead. The image is a loud mourning like the lament for the dead. It is a mourning that cannot be hidden. It is a grief which brings heartache and which brings tears to the eyes. It is grief that is too deep to be concealed.

It is Godly sorrow when one grieves over personal sin. Jesus is describing a Godly sorrow that affects change in the whole person.

-Godly sorrow returns the soul to God. Such mourning can only take place in the sorrow of repentance and is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the convicted sinner.

-The word "mourn" means to have deep sorrow and to show great concern over some existing wrong. It means to be sensitive, tenderhearted, and alert to any sin which might slip into our lives.

The opposite of mourning is not joy. As Jesus uses the word, the opposite of mourning is insensitivity, unconcern, callousness, indifference. Our sins should grieve us because they are an offense to God's holy nature.

-Mourning means more than just being conscious of our sin, or being convicted of our sin or confessing our sin or being sorry for our sin or regretting our sin, it means repenting of our sin.

-Our mind says, "you have sinned;" Our heart says, "You are sorry and you regret your sin;" Our will says, "You repent of and turn from your sin."

-A Sunday school teacher asked her class what repentance meant. A boy replied, "Repentance means you're sorry for your sin." "That's right!" said the teacher. But then a little girl spoke up: "Excuse me, but it means being sorry enough to quit!"

-2 Cor. 7:10 "Godly sorrow leads to repentance".

When was the last time you mourned over your sin? When was the last time you wept over your sin? Or are you cold and indifferent toward the sin in your life?

-No wonder there are so many unhappy Christians. They are not sensitive enough toward their sins that their sins actually trouble them.

-We ought to never make light of our personal sins. We need to grieve over them.

David gives us a wonderful example of mourning over his sin after he was confronted with his sin of adultery and murder. We see David mourning over his sin in Ps. 32 and 51.

-See Ps. 51:2-4, 7-14

What happens when we don't confess our sins to God and mourn over them. Ps. 32:3-5

We are all sinners. We struggle with our weakness and evil desires. The world wants us to justify our sin, to try to forget it, to bury it. But, no one can be happy until he mourns over that sin, confesses it and receives God's forgiveness. James 4:8-10

There are some things that will hinder you in the mourning process:

1. Love of sin: Let's admit it. For a while, sin can be fun. It's hard to mourn over something you enjoy. We've got to ask God to break our hearts and show us how wrong we really are.

2. Despair: Satan will tell us that God has given up on us because of our sin. He wants to keep us where we are.

3. Conceit: Trying to hide our sin and pretend it isn't there.

4. Procrastination: "One of these days, I'll get right with God." "Today if you hear His voice" "Harden not your heart"

II. The Motive for Mourning

Only when a person mourns over his own sinfulness will he be comforted by the only comforter who can relieve his spiritual anguish.

-To those who mourn, God grants pardon, forgiveness, deliverance, strength and reassurance.

Go back to the life of David and see how God comforted him. Ps. 32:1-2, 7, 10-11

On the other side of tears is God's peace. Don't be afraid to weep over your sins.

Have you ever heard the expression, "good grief?" Grief is healthy!

-We made a mistake when we took the mourner's bench out of our churches. People use to come forward with tears streaming down their faces, headed to the mourner's bench. Why? Because the Lord was at work. Sins were forgiven. Fractured marriages were restored. Ruptured relationships healed by the power of God. Guilt vanished and joy was restored.

The first thing we'll feel in eternity is the gentle hand of God, wiping the tears from our eyes. We shall be delivered from the very presence of sin.

-But until then, He comes beside us when we sin, convicts us troubles our hearts, waiting, wanting to comfort us.

Will you let Him? "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Happy Are the Harnessed Matt. 5:1-5

Jesus did not come just to make things better; He came to make things new! 2 Cor. 5:17

-When we are saved, we are new creatures in Christ Jesus. He changes us on the inside and that change is reflected on the outside.

-Our Lord changes our spirit, which in turn changes our attitudes, which in turn changes our actions, which in turn changes how we live before God and men.

We come to the third Beatitude. When Jesus talked about the poor in spirit, He was talking about our condition; when He talked about those who mourn, He was talking about our contrition; Now, He talks about meekness, which refers to control.

Has it ever occurred to you that there is happiness in meekness?

-Call someone in the world meek and they will consider that an insult. The world thrives on retaliation, insist on its rights, and does not hesitate to put self above others. So the Biblical idea of meekness will not fit the world's interest at all.

-The world considers meekness a weakness, not a strength. They believe that if you are meek, you will not get anywhere in life and will be trampled underfoot.

If I were to say, "Everyone who wants to be meek, come up here and stand by me." Most of you would say, "No, thank you! There are a lot of things I may want to be, but meek is not one of them."

-Yet, in the only autobiographical description of His personality, Jesus said, "I am meek and lowly in heart." (Matt. 11:29)

I. The Meaning of Meekness

There are two main reasons we are not interested in being meek:

1. Meekness is opposite to our nature.

Our nature says, "Might makes right! Meekness is weakness!" and "Nice guys finish last;" "Look out for number one!"

2. We have a misunderstanding of meekness.

We say, "He is meek as a lamb" or "as meek as a mouse." We get the idea of someone who is spineless and cowed down and if you said, "Boo!" in their direction, they would run like a scared rabbit.

What is meekness?

Most scholars point out there is little difference between "Poor in spirit" in verse three and "meek" in verse five. The main difference is that to be "poor in spirit" refers to our relationship to God and the "meek" emphasis man's relationship to his fellow man.

Meekness is the opposite of SELF-WILL toward God, and of ILL-WILL toward man.

-Meekness has to do with Gentleness – Yieldedness – Patience – Forbearance. Meekness is not vindictive, does not exalt itself and is not cruel and unkind. Meekness is not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self – importance. Wycliffe translates Matt. 5:5 as "Blessed be mild men."

-A meek person is a God – controlled person. It is strength under God's control. Paul list meekness as the Fruit of the Spirit. When we are walking in the spirit, we will walk in meekness, under the spirit's control.

The Greek word "meekness" emphasizes a proper balance between too much and too little. For example:

Fire under control is good. It can warm you, cook your meals; but out of control, fire can destroy a lifetime of work.

Water under control is good. You can wash with it, be refreshed by it; but out of control, water can flood homes and fields.

Wind under control is good. It can generate power or refresh you on a hot day; but out of control, it can destroy everything in its path.

Temper under control is good; but out of control it is very harmful. Someone said, "Temper is such a wonderful thing; it's a shame to lose it."

Some Marks of Meekness

A person who is meek is:

A. Tamable

The word "meek" is actually a word picture of a wild animal, maybe a wild horse, that has been tamed. Once tamed, he has come under the controlling influence of the one who has tamed him.

-Here is a horse that has never been meeked or broken. It throws its rider and runs through fences. It is a free spirit. But here comes a cowboy who is going to meek or break the horse so he can ride it. He doesn't want to break down the muscular system of the horse. He wants the horse to have strength and power. He doesn't want to break down the energy or determination or the ability of the horse. All he wants to do is to tame it, to put it under harness, to put it under his control. All of the horse's energy, strength, ability, and talents will be under the control of the one who rides him. Before long, a child can climb on the horse's back and the horse now has a gentle spirit. The horse doesn't lose any of its power; its power is just redirected. Now it responds when the reins are gently pulled.

-The taming of a rebel is a tough job; but the man who once lived as he pleased, learns to respond when the Holy Spirit pulls on his reins.

-A meek person is someone who has come under the controlling influence of the one who has tamed him.

B. Tempered

When you temper steel in fire, you heat it to the desired heat so you can shape it and then you let it cool. The result is consistency. Meekness is accepting God's will in your life and leaving the rest up to Him.

It is Abraham, who had the rights to all the land of Canaan. When a dispute arose between the servants of Abraham and the servants of Lot concerning grazing rights, Abraham could have said, "Listen you little parasite, you'll graze where I tell you to graze." But Abraham willingly gave up his rights for the sake of harmony and for the sake of his testimony. He could have used might, but he chose meekness.

Meekness is Joseph who was sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers. Through the passing of time, God elevated Joseph to second in command in Egypt. When his brothers came to buy food from him, Joseph could have killed them or sent them into slavery, but he showed them great compassion and said, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good."

Moses is called the meekest man on the face of the earth. (Ex. 12:3) After his first wife died, Moses married a black woman. By the way, this was before God said that the Jews, and I believe us as well, are to marry within their own race. His sister, Miriam, and his brother, Aaron, insulted him and blasphemed his wife. What did Moses do? Did he lose his temper and slap them? No. He let God take care of it and God did a good job. Miriam was mad because Moses had a black wife. So, God just turned her white with leprosy. Moses prayed for Miriam and asked God to make her well.

Meekness is Jesus praying for those who were nailing Him to a tree, asking His Father to forgive them.

C. Transformable

It's one thing to be taught by God and it's another thing to allow Jesus to change you – to transform you into His likeness.

-The Apostle John allowed Jesus to change him from the Son of Thunder into the Apostle of Love. Meekness carries the idea of allowing Jesus to change us into His likeness.

-A little boy saw some men working on a skyscraper. The boy asked his dad, "Why are those little boys on top of that tall building?" His dad explained that they were not boys, but men. They just looked small because they were up so high. The boy said, "Well, when they get to heaven, you won't be able to see them at all, will you?" The closer we get to Jesus, the less folks will see of us.

D. Tenderness – Matt. 5:43-45

Meekness is the absence of retaliation – I Peter 2:21-23

-The weapons of a weak, small person is slander, gossip, and a get – even – with attitude.

-Here's a test to see how meek you are: That person who has done you wrong and who stabbed you in the back, if you had it within your power, would you bless them or blast them?

III. The Motive for Meekness

The word “inherit” means “to receive by a lot, to possess.” It signifies “to take possession of your inheritance. It is yours; here, take possession and enjoy it.”

-It implies a future millennial reign when God rules over all the earth. There is coming a day when the Lord God will reign upon the earth and His people will enjoy their inheritance.

- The New English Bible reads: “They shall have the earth for their possession.”
- Phillips says: “For the whole earth will belong to them.”

But I think it means more than that – Phil. 4:11

-A man recently spent a day sight-seeing in New York City. He had a wonderful time, but when he returned to his motel, he bowed reverently before God and said: “Lord, I just want to thank

Thee that I haven't seen a thing today that I wanted.” This man is inheriting the earth. He can admire without coveting, and enjoy without owning.

Happy Are the Hungry Matt. 5:6

When Jesus used those two words, “hunger and thirst”, He used two words that deal with the most significant needs and desires of mankind. “Hunger and thirst” - the desire to eat and the desire to drink.

We can do without a lot of things in life, but we must have food and drink.

-It is interesting that Jesus declared Himself to be The Living Bread and The Living Water!

-We might better understand the words “hunger and thirst” if we used the words desire and ambition. “Blessed are they who do desire to be righteous and have the ambition to be righteous.

As we have with the other Beatitudes, there are three things we need to look at as we study this Beatitude:

I. The Meaning of Hungering and Thirsting After Righteousness

“Righteousness” means to be right with God, and in our personal lives, it means being and doing what is right. It is perfect conformity to God's holy law and His will. Righteousness is an attribute of God, and as His child, we are to be like Him and have that same characteristic in our life.

Notice carefully that Jesus is not talking about IMPUTED righteousness only, but IMPARTED righteousness, also.

Jesus is addressing those who already belong to Him. Those who belong to Him have been pronounced right with God based upon what Christ did for us. This is our legal righteousness or justification. Remember that justification means that because I have trusted Jesus as my Savior, He has forgiven my sins – past, present, and future – and in God's sight I stand before Him just as if I had never sinned.

-God declared us righteous in His presence the very moment we believed on Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. This is not a self-righteousness or righteousness obtained by works of obedience, it is righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ. We are declared to be in a right relationship with God based upon the person and atoning work of Jesus Christ – Rom. 10:9-10, 13

Imputed righteousness is a right standing the believer has before God because of the atoning work of Jesus Christ on his behalf.

This is our Position in Christ. It is totally unmerited. It is an act of grace on God's behalf toward the unrighteous person. It is something God out of grace and love does on behalf of the believing sinner.

In this fourth Beatitude, our Lord's emphasis is on the Impartation of righteousness. He is referring not to our Position in Christ only, but our Practice before Christ and our fellowman.

-Since we have been justified by faith in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, we will produce righteousness in our daily life. The term Jesus uses embraces both imputed and imparted righteousness.

-There must be an intense desire to live a life of righteousness, to be pleasing to God with my daily life. This is progressive sanctification.

God is the One who places this hunger in the believer and then He produces this righteousness in the believer. It is His work of grace in the believer. It is not something a person can achieve of himself, but the believer does have to make himself available to God for Him to do it.

Understand that Jesus is not talking about physical hunger, but spiritual hunger. Physical hunger and spiritual hunger are not the same. In physical hunger, the more you eat the more satisfied you are and the less you want to eat; in spiritual hunger, the more you feed on the Word, the more satisfied you are and the more you want to feed on the Word.

-In the physical, the more you neglect to get food, the more hungry you become; in the spiritual, the more you neglect to feed on the Word of God, the less your appetite for the Word.

Ask yourself some questions:

- On a scale from 1 to 10, how hungry am I for spiritual things?
- What is my attitude toward personal righteousness?
- What do I hunger for in life? To what extent do I hunger for God's Word? How is my appetite for the truth of the Bible?
- What is my attitude toward worship? What is my attitude toward deep spiritual truth? In what ways am I growing in my love for holiness?

Look carefully at the Beatitude: "Blessed are they that DO hunger and thirst after righteousness; who DO desire to be righteous."

-The word "DO" speaks of a present desire and a continuous desire; a desire that never stops. You see, there is no time where you arrive in the Christian life. You always need to grow deeper; go further, develop more as a Christian.

-Someone said that the Christian life is like riding a bicycle, you either go forward or fall off.

The kind of appetite we have is an indication of the kind of heart we have. What are your hungers? Your desires? What is your mind fixed on most often?

-“You are what you eat!” If you eat junk food – donuts, cookies, soda, chips, ice cream – it will affect your health. But if you eat foods that are good for you - vegetables, whole grains, lean meat – you will be healthier and stronger. Our hunger determines our spiritual health.

-When we are saved, God gives us new spiritual taste buds!

What does Jesus mean by the term righteousness? Jesus uses the word “righteousness” four other times in the Sermon on the Mount: Matt. 5:10, 20; 6:1, 33.

-Put these four passages together and what do you have? We are to hunger and thirst after: A truly Christian lifestyle that changes us from the inside out, so that we no longer seek the praise of men, but causes us to seek God's approval above everything else. This kind of life is possible for all of us.

“Righteousness” means “that which is acceptable to God or approved of God; Integrity, virtue, purity of life, correctness of thinking, feeling, and acting. It is personal holiness that involves having a clear conscience with God and men – Acts 24:16

-It is a desire to be free from sin in all forms.

The secret of happiness lies not in doing what we WANT, but in doing what we OUGHT!

II. The Marks of Hungering and Thirsting After Righteousness

The closer one walks with God, the closer he wants to be. The more one knows the righteousness of God, the more righteous he hungers to become. It's an all-consuming passion.

1. Moses hungered for more of God. Ex. 33:11, 18-23

2. David hungered for more of God. Ps. 63:1-4

3. Paul hungered for more of God. Phil. 3:10

4. Peter hungered for more of God. 2 Peter 3:18

III. The Motive for Hungering and Thirsting After Righteousness

"I don't know how much of Jesus you have, but you have about as much of Jesus as you want." Of course you have all of Jesus, but He has only as much of you as you allow Him to have.

How do I get back my spiritual hunger? How do I develop spiritual hunger? Forced Feeding! Get back to Bible reading and prayer. You don't want to, but do it anyway. Keep doing it and you'll find something that connects with your spirit and it will fire you up to study more. If you don't do that, your Christian life will be stuck in neutral.

A young man asked his pastor how to be happy. The pastor said, "Come with me. I'll show you how to find happiness." They walked to the river, where the young man assumed he would probably get baptized. When they were chest-deep in the river, the pastor suddenly grabbed the young man's head and forced it under the water. The young man thrashed about violently, convinced he was going to drown. At last he managed to get his head above and gasp for air. The pastor looked him in the eye and said, "Young man, when you hunger and thirst after righteousness as desperately as you craved air just now, then happiness will be yours."

A twelve year old girl from the slums of Chicago was rushed to the hospital, diagnosed as having double pneumonia. Hospital administrators put her story together and discovered she was scrubbing floors twelve hours a day to support her mother and her four brothers and sisters. In the bitter cold of winter she had developed pneumonia and was terribly underweight from malnutrition.

One day a nurse brought her a glass of milk. The girl looked up and asked, "How much can I have?"

"What do you mean, Honey?" asked the nurse.

"The milk. How much can I have?"

"Why, all of it, of course," replied the nurse. "Why do you ask?"

"Because at my house we draw a line on the glass. You can only drink to the line, and then you have to pass the glass to someone else."

The Bible says, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and you labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare". (Is. 55:1-2). God doesn't draw a line on the glass.

Are you looking for real happiness? When you hunger and thirst after righteousness as desperately as a drowning man craves air, you will find it.

Happy Are the Helpers Matt. 5:1-7

We have come to the halfway point in our Lord's Beatitudes.

-The first four Beatitudes deal with our relationship to God. The poor in spirit are spiritually bankrupt before God. He is a sinner and has nothing to commend himself to God. Because of that, he mourns over his sin and his sinful condition. He is broken before God. In meekness and humility, he comes to God and asks God to meek him. He wants God to be in control to his life. Now, the desire of his heart is to live righteously before both God and man.

-The last four Beatitudes deals with our relationship toward men. Those who have received salvation are to extend mercy and live pure lives and always seek to make peace with others and even be willing to pay the price of being persecuted for righteousness

sake.

One of the most amazing attributes of God is His mercy.

-Lam. 3:22-23

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,

There is no shadow of turning with Thee;

Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not;

As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be.

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see;

All I have needed Thy hand hath provided

Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto Me!

Ps. 103:11; 145:9

Eph. 2:4-6 "But God, who is rich", rich, rich, rich, "in mercy." He is not selfish with His mercy. He is not hesitant to give out His mercy.

Titus 3:5-7; I Peter 1:3

I. The Meaning of Being Merciful

Notice the word "merciful." When you see the letters "ful" at the end of a word, it means to be full of something.

- "Thankful" means to be full of thanks or thanksgiving
- "Merciful" means to be full of mercy.

What does it mean to be merciful? First, I want to deal with what it is NOT!

1. Being "merciful" does not mean that we have to tolerate wicked behavior or ignore it or pay no attention to it.

The United States has been morally weakened because our nation is putting up with all sorts of perversion today. Homosexuality, drug addiction, drunkenness, abortion, and other evils are tolerated by much of society who think, that in doing so, they are showing love and mercy. The toleration of sin, however, has nothing to do with love, compassion, or mercy.

2. Some falsely believe that by minimizing or eliminating entirely the punishment of criminals for their crimes is showing mercy.

Capital punishment is treated by many as a most unmerciful deed. Television covers the demonstrations of people that demand mercy for a murderer on the eve of his execution. Leniency in punishment for serious crimes is not mercy. Instead, it is cruelty to the innocent victim and a further threat to society.

-God has ordained government to use capital punishment as a crime deterrent, especially upon those guilty of crimes such as first – degree murder – Romans 13:1-6

The opposite of mercy is hostility, a critical spirit that expresses itself in unforgiveness, condemning, judging, and faultfinding. It is also being unconcerned, indifference, not willing to get involved.

-There is more than one way to be unmerciful. In the story of the Good Samaritan, it is easy to see that the thieves were unmerciful. But the priest and the Levite were unmerciful in another way. These men who could talk the talk would not walk the walk. They looked, saw a man lying there beaten, bloody, bruised, and dying, and what did they do? They turned away and walked to the other side. It's always easier on the other side. You don't have to get involved. It's not going to cost you anything on the other side.

-If you are going to be merciful, there may be a risk. When the Samaritan went down to help that fellow who had been beaten, how did he know the thieves were not waiting on him, hiding behind rocks, ready to beat him.

3. Being merciful is more than just FEELING compassion, it is meeting the need of those in need.

The word “merciful” means “to be compassionate, to be concerned about people in need and attempt to meet the need, it is the ability to get right inside the other person's skin until we can see things with his eyes, think things with his mind, and feel things with his feelings.”

Mercy and grace are often found together in scripture. Mercy pities us; grace pardons us. Grace comes first, removing our sin; Mercy eliminates the punishment. With mercy, I do not get what I deserve – Hell. With God's grace, I get what I don't deserve – Heaven.

Mercy and love go together.

The mercy and love of Lincoln at the end of the Civil War set the stage for restoring the United States. After Lee's surrender, Lincoln spoke to a large crowd from the balcony of the White House. He told them of the policy he had in mind for the South. At the end of his speech, Senator Harlan asked, “What shall we do with the rebels?” The vindictive crowd shouted, “Hang them!” Their bitterness of heart wanted no compassion or mercy for the rebels. Tad Lincoln turned to his father and said, “No, no, papa. Not hang them. Hang on to them!” “That's it!” replied Lincoln joyfully. “Tad has it. We must hang on to them!” At the time, Tad was only eleven, but he understood the importance of mercy.

Mercifulness involves action and personal involvement.

One night a cobbler dreamed that the next day Jesus was coming to visit him. The dream seemed so real that he got up very early the next morning, hurried to the woods, where he gathered some things to decorate his shop for the arrival of his Great Guest. He waited all morning, but, to his disappointment, his shop remained quiet, except for an old man who limped up to the door and asked if he could come in for a few moments to warm himself.

While the man was resting, the cobbler noticed the old fellow's shoes were worn through. It touched his heart, so the cobbler took a new pair of shoes he had made and put them on the feet of the old man. Throughout the afternoon the cobbler waited, but his only visitor was an elderly woman who was struggling under a heavy load of firewood. He saw the old woman was hungry, so he gave her a nourishing meal. As night came, the cobbler heard a child crying outside his door. The child was lost and afraid, so he calmed the child's fears and took the child home.

When he returned home, the cobbler was sad, he was convinced that while he had been away, he missed the visit of his Lord. The cobbler said in anguish, “Why is it, Lord, that your feet delayed? Have you forgotten that this was the day?” Then, softly in the silence, the Lord quietly spoke to his heart, “Lift up your heart for I kept My Word. Three times I came to your friendly door. I was the man with the bruised feet; I was the woman you gave to eat; I was the child on the homeless street.” -Matt. 25:35-40

Mercy and forgiveness go together

The person who needs mercy is the guilty. He is guilty and doesn't deserve mercy. He deserves justice, but he wants mercy. That's why he throws himself on the mercy of the court and pleads for mercy.

-If you are merciful you will be forgiving and that means that you refuse to nurse a grudge.

Mercy is prudent, wise, and discerning in its performance.

It knows when giving a handout may not be the most merciful thing to do. Instead of a handout, a job or counsel may be better help. We need to use wisdom that we don't encourage them in laziness or in helping them to buy such things as alcohol, tobacco or drugs. Scripture says if a man will not work, then he should not eat. If he cannot work is one thing, but if he will not work is another. Hunger is a great remedy for laziness.

II. The Marks of Being Merciful

Those who have received mercy from the Lord ought to be merciful to others. We reap what we sow. If we are merciful to others, Most Of The Time, others will be merciful to us.

-This is not always the case. All men may not treat you kindly, for some men are cruel no matter how much mercy you show them. Look at what men did to Jesus.

Jesus is our ultimate example. From the cross He cried, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

III. The Motive for Being Merciful

Talk about a good deal! We are blessed when we receive mercy from God, and then we are blessed again by giving what was given to us!

-We get back what we give! Mercy is given to me; I give it to someone else; and it comes back to me! -Proverbs 11:17

When you stand before the Lord, will you receive justice or mercy? It all depends on what you did with the mercy He extended to you.

Happy Are the Holy Matt. 5:1-8

“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”

Isn't that what Christianity is all about – the condition of our heart and our seeing God?

What if the headlines on the front page of the Daily Journal read: “Appearing Live at the BancorpSouth Conference Center Sunday July 24, 2011: God will be here live on stage. A once in a lifetime experience. Tickets will be on sale this week Monday thru Friday.”

How much do you think the tickets would go for? Well, today, I'm going to tell you how you can see God!

Two things I want to share with you:

I. The Meaning of Being Pure in Heart

Being pure in heart is not too popular in today's modern world. You talk to folks today about being pure in heart and you are immediately classified as old-fashioned and out-of-date. Purity and living a life of purity seems so flat and dull, while a slight mixture of wickedness seems spicy and intriguing.

-That kind of thinking is what got our world in the mess she is in today. If purity is old-fashioned and out-of-date, we had better return to being old-fashioned and out-of-date. If purity is dull and flat, we had better go back to being dull and flat.

Two words jump out at me in the first part of this verse: Heart and Pure.

A. Heart

God is concerned about what is going on in our hearts – not pure in body, but pure in heart. You can, at the same moment, be pure in your body and not be pure in your heart.

-That was the problem of the Pharisees. They liked the idea of “Blessed are the pure” as long as the statement stopped right there. They were experts at outward purity. They had many rules and regulations covering what you ate, what you wore, how far you could walk on the Sabbath, and so on. They scored an A+ on being outwardly pure, but they flunked out on inward purity.

-To be pure in body is good. To be pure in mind is better. But to be pure in heart is best of all because it includes all the rest. If you are pure in heart, you will be pure everywhere. To be pure in heart means being pure from the inside out.

When Jesus talks about a pure heart, He is not talking about that physical organ that pumps the blood. When Jesus talks about the heart, He is talking about the center and source of the whole inner man, with its thinking, feeling, and emotions. It is the place where we make our moral decisions.

A heart without God's control is the source of our troubles – Jer. 17:9; Matt. 15:19-20a; Prov. 23:7

God has always been more concerned with the inside of man, his heart, than anything else – 1 Sam. 16:7; Prov. 4:23; Ps. 51:10; Matt. 22:36-38

-If your relationship with God is right, you will love Him with your total being. The heart is important

because once you get a person's heart, then you have the person.

-What does it mean when we say to somebody, “I love you with all of my heart?” It is our whole being, the whole fiber of what we are – everything – our mind, our soul, our body, our strength – everything. If we love someone with the whole heart, then that means we're totally committed to that person.

The opposite of a pure heart is one that is divided. Our loyalties are totally committed to the one we love.

-We like to hear from our spouses, “Honey, I love you with my whole heart.” I wouldn't want to be married to someone who said, “I love you with half my heart.”

B. Pure

The Greek word for "Pure" is "Katharos", from which we get our word "catheter", which is an instrument for removing impurities from the body.

-The word "Pure" means unmixed, unadulterated, sincere, no hypocrisy, no double allegiance.

-A pure-hearted person is one whose motives are unmixed, whose thoughts are holy, whose conscience is clean. His devotion to the Lord is focused and undivided.

-Ps. 26:2 David said, "Put me on trial, Lord, and cross-examine me. Test my motives and my heart."

David prayed that his heart would remain pure – Ps. 19:14

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they have nothing to hide."

II. The Motive for Being Pure in Heart

Only those who are pure in heart will see God – Heb. 12:14; I John 3:6; 3 John 11

You only see what you are looking for and you only see what you are able to see.

-Let me give you an example: all of us have known people with dirty minds. These are the people who seem to live in the gutter of life. They can take the most innocent remark and turn it into something ugly. Why is that? Titus 1:15

What we are determines what we see! Ps. 18:20-26; 24:3-5

The purer your heart is, the more of God you will see. It is like someone wearing glasses. When the glasses get dirty, they must be cleaned or your vision is distorted.

God has made provisions for us to purify our hearts daily. Jer. 33:8; Isa. 1:18; I John 1:9

Seeing God does not mean to look upon Him with our natural eye. No one can look upon God with the physical eye and live. It would be like looking directly into the sun. That would blind us. But we can see the blessings and the impact of the sun all around us.

-To see God means to encounter God and to explore God in Christ Jesus. The Pure heart sees God as holy, mighty, and magnificent.

Ultimately, the day is coming when all the redeemed shall indeed see God in Heaven. That will be a spiritual experience, not a physical one with the physical body we now have. We will have a glorified body. I John 3:1-3

-You will not see God unless you are pure in heart. This is the condition for seeing Him face to face one day in heaven.

There is coming a day when my Jesus I shall see

When I look upon His face, the One who saved me by His grace

When He takes me by the hand and leads me through the promised land,

What a day, glorious day, that will be.

Happy Are the Healers Matt. 5:1-9

We live in a very violent world that seems bent on destruction. News about bombings, bleeding, broken bodies, battles, and butchery are as common as weather reports.

-Man has been in conflict almost from his very existence. Human strife had its beginning on the outskirts of Eden when Cain, driven by envy, murdered his more devout brother, Able.

-Jesus spoke prophetically of our times when He said: "And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars...nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." (Matt. 24:6-7).

-Someone has pointed out that over the past 4,000 years, there has been less than 30 years of peace, and even that was most likely not universal peace.

-Since the death of Jesus Christ, there have been over 15,000 known wars. Since 1945, there have been some 70 wars and nearly 200 international outbreaks of violence.

Dr. Robert Oppenheimer, who supervised the making of the first atomic bomb, was asked to appear before a congressional committee. They asked him if there was any defense against this awesome new weapon of war. "Certainly," said the great scientist. "And that is, sir..." someone asked. The audience awaited the answer in subdued silence. "Peace", the scientist answered softly.

The world is desperately searching for peace; and, yet, we seem further from peace than ever before. There is no economic peace, religious peace, racial peace, social peace, family peace, or personal peace. There seems to be no end to marches, sit-ins, protest, demonstrations, riots, and wars. Disagreement and conflict are the order of the day. No day has been in need of peace more than our day.

Again in this Beatitude, we will examine three things:

I. The Meaning of Being a Peacemaker

The reason we need Peacemakers so badly is because there are so many Peace-breakers or trouble-makers. Instead of bringing people together, they pull them apart.

-A pastor, Dr. Bell, spoke of a woman in his church as a "peace-breaker." He said, "She breaks the peace by talking too much. She gossips and chatters and offers her opinion about everyone and everything and gets people all stirred up." Could such a thing be said about you? In your personal relationship are you a peacemaker or a peace breaker?

Peace in the Bible means more than just the absence of trouble, conflict, and evil things. It means everything which makes for man's highest good. It bears the idea of wholeness and overall well-being.

-The word "peace" means to put together that which has been torn. The Hebrew word "shalom" is a Jewish greeting which means "peace to you", but it is a broad term related to health, prosperity, harmony, wholeness, and all the blessings of God.

-"Peacemakers are people who breath grace!" Aaron give this benediction – Num. 6:24-25

It is important to remember that peace in the Bible is always based on justice and righteousness. When justice prevails and righteousness rules, there you will also have peace. But without these two virtues, lasting peace is not possible. Ps. 85:10

The word "make" in the term "peacemakers" is a strong word which means "to do" or "to make."

Peace must be made. Peace never happens by chance. Someone has to drag the combatants to the table and give them a reason to put down their arms.

-A peacemaker is someone who is actively working to reconcile men to God and to one another. He or she is a "minister of reconciliation" who has been given the "message of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:18-21).

Charles Swindoll writes: "Peacemakers release tension, they don't intensify it. Peacemakers seek solutions and find no delight in arguments. Peacemakers calm the waters, they don't trouble them. Peacemakers work hard to keep an offense from occurring. And if it has occurred, they strive for resolution. Peacemakers generate more light than heat. Blessed are such greathearted souls! We need more of them in the ranks of faith. We have more than enough fighters; more than enough who are ready to pounce."

Our Lord is on a recruiting mission. He is looking for a few volunteers to join God's Peace Corps. We are called to go as peacemakers – Reconciling...intervening ...uniting...mediating... binding up the wounded and sharing God's gracious peace.

There are some Prerequisites to being a peacemaker:

1. God, Himself, is the Greatest Peacemaker

.Phil. 4:9 God is the God of peace.

.Col. 1:20 Jesus made peace between God and man through the blood of His cross.

.Rom. 5:1 We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus.

.Eph. 2:13-14

- Although God has never been humanity's enemy, we by choice became enemies of God. The revolt began in the Garden of Eden. We made a deliberate choice to rebel against God, but Jesus made peace through His cross.

- The cross is a wonderful picture of Reconciliation. He made provisions for all men to be at peace with God. He reached up to heaven to reach the hand of the Father and reached down to the hand of mankind and brought them together who were separated by sin.
- There is a painting in England that shows a soldier repairing a communication line. The line had been shot in two. A message that meant the lives of hundreds of men was at stake. He had nothing to repair the break with. While the enemy shells were bursting around him, he took one broken cable in his left hand and grasped the other with his right hand and made the connection. The painting had a one word title: "Through". In His death on the cross, Christ repaired the breach between God and man. Eph. 2:14 says, "He is our peace." Those who were afar off are made nigh. He has made both one. **THROUGH HIM ALONE** we have peace!

2. Before we can be peacemakers, we must be at peace with God.

Isa. 57:20-21 A person who doesn't belong to God doesn't have any inward peace. They may look peaceful, try to convince themselves that they are at peace, but there is not peace for the unbeliever.

-Rom. 3:17 "The way of peace have they not known." Unbelievers do not know peace because they do not know the Prince of Peace.

-If you're not a Christian, you're at war with God.

3. Peacemakers make every effort to make peace with others.

Peacemaking is not an easy business. It is costly, time-consuming, emotionally exhausting, and sometimes painful. Those who do it will often be misunderstood.

-Sometimes trying to make peace won't work out. When Paul wrote to the Romans, he exhorted them to "live at peace with everyone" (Rom. 12:18). But he added the all-important phrase, "If it be possible." Sometimes it isn't possible. There are those cantankerous types who just go through life picking fights with everyone they meet. You can't always live at peace with people like that. In such cases, just make sure that no one can blame you when there is conflict.

4. A Peacemaker helps others make peace with others

I once read the story of a couple at a divorce hearing who were arguing back and forth before the judge. They were accusing each other and refusing to take any blame themselves. Their little four – year – old son was terribly distressed and confused. Not knowing what else to do, he took his father's hand and his mother's hand and kept tugging until he finally pulled the hands of his parents together.

Where does peacemaking need to take place?

a. In the Home

In one of his books, Charlie Shedd said that he and his wife had had a fuss before he went to work. When he got back home, his wife had gone shopping, but she left him a note on the refrigerator that read: "Dear Charlie, I hate you. Love, Martha".

-Sometimes husbands and wives are so caught up in who's right and who's wrong that they forget what's right and wrong. Do you want to be right or do you want harmony in your home?

-Someone asked a couple who had had a long and successful marriage how they had gotten along so well together all those years. He said, "Well, at the beginning of our marriage we made a deal: If she got mad at me, she would clean the house. If I got mad at her, I would take long walks in the woods. I have mostly lead an outdoor life."

Nothing insights conflicts like words. Notice Prov. 15:1. This is a general truth. Does it work every time? No, but as a general rule, a soft answer quiets wrath.

-Think of all the arguments you've had with your wife or your husband or with your children. How many of the arguments would have been avoided if you had not said that hasty word? And the minute you said it, that little voice inside of you said, "Oh, no. Now I'm in trouble. Why did I say that? I didn't have to say that."

-Psalm 19:14 My words are always on a test.

b. In the Church

We might as well face it: strife has even infiltrated our church life. Sometimes there is internal bickering and carnal disputes.

-We're told in Luke 2 that Joseph and Mary lost Jesus. Where did they lose Him? They lost Him in the most unlikely place – in the temple. I've seen folks lose Jesus in the church – in the choir room, the Sunday School room, and the business meetings.

-Matt. 5:23-24 What if someone in the church refuses to make peace with a brother or sister? Romans 16:17-18

II. The Mark of Being a Peacemaker

Let me share one example: Abigail was the wife of Nabal, who treated David so rudely. David and his men had protected Nabal's herds and he refused to pay recompense. David threatened bloody revenge, but Abigail took action to bring peace. She brought David liberal gifts of food and plead for her husband, whom she knew was worthless.

III. The Motive of Being a Peacemaker

I'm happy to tell you that there is a reward for being a peacemaker. The word “called” means an official designation. You will be called – named – recognized – identified – designated as a true child of God.

-When you make peace, you become like the God of Peace. Peacemakers bear a family resemblance that even people of the world can see.

We are called to go into the world as peacemakers. The greatest need is to reconcile men and women to God. That is the heart of the gospel.

Happy are the Harassed Matt. 5:1-12

We come to the eighth and final Beatitude of our Lord in His Sermon on the Mount.

-The central theme of the Beatitudes is righteousness. The first two have to do with recognizing our own unrighteousness, and the next five have to do with our seeking and reflecting righteousness. The last Beatitudes have to do with our suffering for the sake of righteousness and of Christ.

The first four Beatitudes deals with what God wants to do IN us: Happy are the poor in spirit; the humble; those who mourn over their sin; the meek who are under the Spirit's control; and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

-The next three Beatitudes reveal what comes out of us because of what God has done in us: we should be merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers.

-The walk of the believer is now followed by the warfare he may face: He may suffer persecution.

-It is interesting that the first seven beatitudes only use the word “blessed” once. The eighth beatitude mentions it twice (v. 10, 11). It is as though Jesus is saying, “You are doubly blessed if you are persecuted.”

Christians have been persecuted since the birth of the church. You know that the first Christian martyr was Stephen who was stoned to death for his faith. Jesus said that before the birth of the church, God's prophets were persecuted and put to death.

-Heb. 11:32-40 describes some of the ways God's people have been persecuted. Some were sawed in two long ways; some were stoned; some were covered with pitch and used as a human torch for Nero; some were wrapped in animal skins and thrown to vicious hunting dogs; some were decapitated, to name a few ways that Christians were persecuted.

-You say, “I'm glad we don't live in those early days of the church when they persecuted Christians that way.” Billy Graham wrote not too long ago: “It has been estimated that more Christians have suffered and died for their faith in the last 100 years than in all previous centuries combined.” We don't suffer like that in America today, but I believe we may very well be before everything is said and done.

Chuck Colson in a current issue of Christianity Today entitled “Tortured for Christ – and Ignored”, gives some facts about persecution around the world:

The Muslim government in Sudan has made it a crime to convert to Christianity – a policy enforced brutally. Thousands of children have been snatched from Christian families and many sold as slaves to buyers in Sudan, Libya and other Islamic countries. Thousands of Christian women have been raped; others sold as servants or concubines. Christian men are being crucified.

In Ethiopia last year, government troops raided the largest evangelical church, arresting most attenders. Many died in jail, their bodies thrown out to be scavenged by animals.

In Pakistan, Christian evangelization is outlawed by a law that prohibits speaking against the prophet Mohammed, punishable by death.

In Saudi Arabia, the government offers rewards of up to \$8,000.00 for information about secret worship services, which are then raided to arrest believers.

- John 15:20 “No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”
- 2 Tim. 3:12 “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

Four things I want to share with you:

I. The Reality of Being Persecuted – 5:10-11

This is an unpopular Beatitude. It is the blessing no one wants. By definition, persecution involves pain and suffering, and who wants that? Most of us would rather have the blessing that comes to the merciful than the blessing that comes to the persecuted. Few healthy people freely choose the path of persecution.

Let me tell you what Jesus IS NOT talking about:

This Beatitude does not apply to those who bring trouble on themselves.

-It is not referring to those people who suffer because they are offensive or obnoxious or who break the Law. If you are not tactful or your conduct is unmannerly or if you are rude or disrespectful or if you criticize others or bend the rules or if you are a lazy goldbricker, you deserve to suffer. If you make poor decisions or wrong judgments, you can expect to suffer. -1 Peter 4:12-16

The word “persecuted” means “to pursue in a hostile manner; to harass or to cause trouble in persistent and unrelenting ways.” It doesn't deliver one blow then quit, but it delivers blow after blow. It is to pursue with hostile intent; to ridicule, denounce, to hunt down.

-The word is a passive perfect participle and could be translated “allow themselves to be persecuted.” It is a continuous willingness to endure persecution if it is the price of godly living. It speaks of a constant attitude of accepting whatever our faithfulness to Christ may bring into our lives.

The key to understanding this principle lies in the word “righteousness.” Jesus said that we will be blessed in the midst of persecution IF we are persecuted “for righteousness sake” and “for His sake”.

-Take the first part of that word - “right”. The word “right” actually means “straight.” When your life is straight by God's standards, it is righteous.

-We live in a crooked world filled with people whose lives are made crooked because of sin. What happens when you put a straight stick next to a pile of crooked sticks? The straightness of the straight stick exposes the crookedness of the crooked sticks. You don't have to say anything about the straight stick, the difference is obvious for all to see.

-This Beatitude might be translated, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because their lives are straight.” Persecution is a sign your life is straight in the eyes of the world.

Jesus describes three types of persecution in these verses:

A. Verbal Abuse - “Men will revile you”

The word “revile” means “to throw an insult in someone's face; to throw abusive words in the face of one; to mock them viciously. Christians can expect to be the butt of public jokes and open ridicule that is intended to embarrass or belittle, to put someone down and make them look foolish. They mean to discredit, dishonor, and disgrace Christians. They want to insult you for your faith. When you are insulted for your faith, take heart, you are on the right track.

-Our Lord was reviled by men. They accused Him of being illegitimate, of being demon possessed, and of blasphemy.

-Have you ever been insulted for your faith in Christ? Ever been made fun of or put down in some way? So was Jesus.

B. General Persecution

This is intense hatred for our wonderful Savior by those who are under Satan's control. Take Christ out of the picture and you will stop a lot of persecution. The reason that Islam, the Muslim's religion, can be taught in schools but Christianity is forbidden is that Christianity is about Christ. It does not bother people when Islam is present, because Islam doesn't include Christ, but Christianity is all about Christ.

The name of the Lord is offensive to this wicked world. Even the mention of His name in the word "Christmas" is repulsive to the world. Thus, the words "Merry Christmas" are being replaced with words like "Happy Holidays," "Holiday Greetings" or "Winter Vacation" by our schools, government and department stores.

C. False Accusations – Men shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake."

Folks don't need truth to accuse. They will fabricate and falsify the worse of lies. When people say false things about you because of your faith, take heart, you are on the right track!

II. The Response to Being Persecuted – Mt 5:12

"Rejoice and be exceedingly glad" is not our typical response when we are persecuted. Our typical response is to sulk like a child, to lick our wounds in self-pity, or to just grin and bear it.

-The words "to be exceedingly glad" means "to be overjoyed or to jump for joy!"

Why would we rejoice when we are persecuted? Because persecution is an indication of true discipleship and our reward in Heaven will be great.

- In Acts 16 when Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown in prison and put in stocks because of their stand for the Lord, they began praying and singing and rejoicing at midnight.
- In Acts 5:40-41 When Peter and the other Apostles were beaten and commanded not to speak any more in the name of Jesus, they said, "We must obey God rather than man" and they departed, rejoicing that "they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name sake."

III. The Reasons for Being Persecuted

Why are good, godly people persecuted?

1. Christians are misfits in this world. They don't fit into the actions and attitudes of the world. They are different.

People don't like you when you are different from them. That's one reason there are so many race related problems. We don't feel comfortable around folks who are different from us.

2. There is a spiritual war going on.

Eph 6:12 says that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness. The kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light are at odds against one another.

3. Godly living is a rebuke to ungodly living.

Janice and I pastored one church where the ladies of the church didn't get along with Janice, and the reason was that her godly spirit and presence made some of them feel guilty. They wanted her to join all their social functions in the town, but they liked to sip their wine at the meetings. Janice never said a word to them about their wine. She didn't have to. Her very godly presence made them feel uncomfortable and guilty when she was around them. I told her that it was really a great compliment to her. She was doing something right!

IV. The Reward for Being Persecuted

"Theirs is the kingdom of heaven" and "great is their reward in heaven".

One day a man stopped to watch some men doing stonework on a huge church. One of them was chiseling a triangular piece of stone. "What are you going to do with that?" asked the man. The workman said, "See that little opening away up there near the steeple? Well, I'm shaping this down here so it will fit up there." That's what God is doing with us – shaping us down here so we'll fit up there.

The first convert of a certain missionary was tortured to death for his faith. Years later, the missionary died too. In heaven he met the

first convert and asked him how it felt to be tortured to death for his faith. "You know," the man said with a strange look on his face, "I can't remember."

Salty Saints Matt. 5:13

When is the church least like the church? When it is gathered together for worship on Sundays.

-The church, as God's temple, is where God lives. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth IN you?" (1 Cor. 3:16).

-When we go to work, we take God with us. When we go to school, we take God with us. When we are with our families in our homes, we take God with us.

God asks us to keep a difficult balance as Christians : We must live in the world, but we are not to let the world's ways be in us.

The Beatitudes describe the essential character of the disciples of Christ, the salt and light metaphors indicate the disciples Influence for good in the world.

-God not only expects us to have character in His kingdom, God also has given us an Assignment in His kingdom, and that assignment is given to us in two metaphors: Salt and Light. We will only deal with the metaphor of salt in this message and I'll deal with light in the next message, but I want you to understand that Jesus intended for the truths of both of these metaphors to be in our life.

-When Jesus calls us Salt and Light, that is not a compliment, that is an assignment.

-In the Beatitudes we see the character of the Christian as God gets the world out of us. In the next section we see the contribution of the Christian as God gets us into the world to help it.

-We are not only to reveal Christ to the world, we are also to represent Christ to the world. We are to be living examples of what Christ can do for, to, and with a sinner.

-Our world is not just in trouble, it is in trouble with God! God will hold all men accountable for the evil they do and for the good they fail to do, and He will punish them accordingly. That's why Jesus said, "You who are the earth's salt and you who are the world's light must be living examples to bear witness of what Jesus can do in the sinner's life."

-This sinful world is a dark place with little or no light of its own, so Jesus sends us into the world to illuminate it. The world has a constant tendency to deteriorate. It is putrefying and it cannot stop itself from going bad. The church is set in the world with a double role: as salt to hinder the process of social decay, and as light to dispel the darkness.

So Jesus sends His Salty Saints and His Living Lights into the world to bring God to people and people to God!

-But in our modern world, Christians have been told they need to keep their faith to themselves. Believers are regularly warned: "Don't bring your faith to the office," "We don't want to hear about your faith at school," and "Faith is a private thing, so don't make it public." It's okay to believe in Christ, but we are not supposed to tell anyone about our faith. That message is directly opposed to the words of Jesus Christ.

-Jesus told His followers that they cannot be Christians merely in private. The Christian life is meant to be lived out in public, where it can be seen, heard, and felt.

Two things I want to share with you:

I. The Importance of Being Salt

The word "are" indicates that Jesus is concerned about what we are, our being. Being salt speaks of our effectiveness in the world. We are called salt because salt has:

A. A Preserving Ability

Refrigerators and freezers are relatively modern inventions. Before refrigeration many folks had smoke houses where they packed meat in salt, which would slow down the process of rotting and decay.

-We don't use salt in the same way they did in Jesus' time, but the people who first heard Him preach those words certainly

understood their full meaning. If a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee brought in a big haul of fish, cleaned them, then wanted to ship them to Capernaum, he understood that those fish would spoil in the hot sun without a preservative. They didn't use ice in those days, but would rub salt into the fish to keep them from spoiling.

-The disciples are the salt of the earth and are to be rubbed into the world in order to preserve it from decay; to retard corruption. As salt, Christians are to hold back evil and retard corruption on the path towards hell.

Imagine a world where there was no Christian influence. For example, Christians have been at the forefront of the abortion debate, standing up for the protection of human life. If it were not for those Christians taking a stand to protect the innocent, the horror of abortion would be even more accepted.

-What if Christians had not stood against same sex marriage and other evils in our nation.

-The Book of Revelation reveals the great wickedness that will come on earth when the restraining force of Christians are raptured from this world. Without the ministry of preservation that Christians bring, all hell will break loose on this earth.

A little bit of salt goes a long way. Have you ever seen a recipe that said, "a pinch of salt?" What does that mean? It means just a little bit. Did you know that you are God's pinch of salt in the school where you are. Most of the kids you go to school with are going to die and go to hell. God put you there to be a pinch of salt.

-If the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah had had only ten righteous people – ten pinches of salt – God would have spared the cities.

I am convinced that the presence and the prayers of salty Christians has done more to preserve America than anything else we could name. It is the righteousness of God's children that made America great and it is what keeps this country from being judged today.

-Prov. 14:34; 2 Chron 7:14

B. A Penetrating Ability

Salt will penetrate and infiltrate whatever it touches. It is an aggressive substance. I believe the church has been called by the Lord to be an active force in the world around us. The church should be a militant army charging the very gates of Hell.

-Matt. 16:18

C. A Purifying Ability

Salt has remarkable cleansing ability. Salt in a wound can cleanse the area. Christians have a purifying effect on the world around them.

-Have you ever noticed that folks stop talking and acting certain ways when a child of God walks up?

Don't be offended if folks stop talking when you come around. Just thank God that you are acting as a purifying force in the world around you.

D. A Pleasing Ability

Salt adds flavor. Most foods are bland and boring without salt. Many people in America are leading bland, flavorless lives. They are always trying to do something to get themselves on some kind of "high", so they can experience a little excitement in their lives.

-Most of the non-Christians you work with aren't that interested in heaven or hell – they just want to make it through the week. There is no excitement, no thrill to their tasteless lives.

-The world thinks Christians are the most dull, drab, listless folks on the face of the earth. But Christians should be different. No one on earth has the joy and peace Christians have.

-In Mark 9:50, Jesus says that we are to "have salt in ourselves." How? It is the work of the Word of God and the Spirit of God that produces godly character and enables a child of God to have a godly influence in this world.

-Col. 4:6 Tells us to make sure our speech is always "seasoned with salt." Our speech should not only be a blessing to others, but as a purifying influence within this decaying society.

E. A Poisoning Ability

Salt kills some things. Have you ever poured salt on a slug? Slugs and salt don't mix! Salt poured on a lawn will kill the grass. When

true Christianity is sown into lives, homes, and communities of the world, some things will be put to death. When Jesus comes into a life, drinking, cursing, fighting, and loose living are all put to death in the name of Jesus.

F. A Promoting Ability

It is salt in our system that keeps our body fluids in balance. If we don't have enough salt, our body will not function properly. Your tears, your sweat, your blood are all salty; and as you pass off salt, that salt supply must be replaced or you will faint.

-When I was in basic training they would give us salt tablets to keep our bodies in balance. They also give salt tablets to marathon runners. They make you thirsty so you will keep your body hydrated.

-We are to be so different from those around us that others will thirst for our lifestyle.

-We must never give anyone cause to say, "If that is a Christian, then I never want to be one." Instead, our lives ought to motivate people to say, "That's what I want my life to be like."

G. A Provoking Ability

If you've ever spilled salt onto a cut, you know how it burns. If you speak the truth of God's Word, it is going to irritate some people.

-Do you know why the media bombards the Christian faith today? Because we're irritating. We irritate the baby butchers. We irritate the gay crowd. We irritate corrupt politicians. We are a source of irritation to the ungodly.

II. The Ineffectiveness of Salt

I cannot help to salt the world unless I have salt in myself. If I have lost my enthusiasm and zeal for the Lord; if I leave my first love for the Lord, I become utterly useless.

-While we cannot lose our salvation, we can most certainly lose our usefulness to the Lord and His work.

Nor can I salt the earth if I remain in the shaker. To be useful, salt must make contact or it is good for nothing.

Salt cannot lose its saltiness or flavor, but it can be useless if it is mixed with something else. If you mix salt with sugar or sand, it loses its usefulness. Just so, if we allow the world to come into our lives, we will become good for nothing.

What about your Christian life? Is it making a difference in your world? Are you giving flavor to this dull world?

God help us to be salty saints. We need to pour a lot of salt on this corrupt world!

This Little Light of Mine Matt. 5:14-16

When I was a kid growing up in Sunday School we used to sing a little song that went like this:

This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine,

This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine,

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Put it under a bushel – no! I'm going to let it shine,

Put it under a bushel – no! I'm going to let it shine,

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Don't let Satan blow it out, I'm going to let it shine,

Don't let Satan blow it out, I'm going to let it shine,

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Let it shine til Jesus comes, I'm going to let it shine,

Let it shine til Jesus comes, I'm going to let it shine.

That's what Jesus tells us in these verses we have just read.

-As followers of Jesus, we live in a world that is morally corrupt and that is in spiritual darkness.

-We are not saved by God's grace for ourselves alone. God did not ignore this corrupt, dark world when He saved us. He saved us in order to make us into something that this fallen world desperately needs.

-What an honor we have, to be the most important and the most needed thing in the world – salt and light. But with our great honor comes a great obligation, to be the light of the world. What hope does the world have if we are not faithful to be Light?

I. The Declaration – Mt 5:14

The “you” is emphatic in the Greek text. We might translate it, “you and you alone are the light of the world.”

-That is a very significant statement because that is what Jesus said of Himself! John 8:12; 9:5

The interesting thing is that when Jesus said, “You are the light of the world,” it was the only time that Jesus ever said that we are something that He claimed for Himself.

-Let me give you an illustration: Jesus said, “I am the Bread of heaven, but Jesus never says, “You are the bread from heaven.” Jesus said, “I am the Good Shepherd,” but He never says you are the good shepherd. Jesus said, “I am the Resurrection and the life.” But Jesus never said to us, “You are the resurrection and life.” Jesus said, “I am the Door,” but He never said, “You are the door.”

-But when Jesus said, “I am the Light of the world,” He was claiming something that not only He could be, but something that He would allow us to be. I cannot be bread to the hungry. I cannot be water to the thirsty. I cannot be life to the dead. But I can be light to the world.

-It is something that Jesus has transferred to you and me. John 9:5 says, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world .” But Jesus is no longer physically in the world. Physically Jesus ascended into heaven where He sits at the right hand of the Father. The only way the light of Jesus can be seen on this earth today is through the life of those who belong to Him.

-Now Jesus is the light of heaven. Did you know that? Rev. 21:23

-Notice: “You ARE”: It is not that He wishes we were or that we ought to work hard to become salt and light. How long would that take if it were up to our doing? It would never happen! We are already light by His grace!

Notice: “You are THE light”; The only light from God that this world has.

You can think of it this way: While Jesus walked on this earth, He was like the sun. He was the source of the light that lit up the whole world. But in the same way that, when evening comes, and the sun is gone from the sky, and the moon rises in its place to reflect the light of the sun onto the world; so, now, the church is “the light of the world.” The church now serves to reflect onto the world the light of Him who is the true light. He shines upon us; and we shine upon the world.

Listen: Our world needs light. There has never been a day when our world has been in greater darkness.

-Light brings warmth. It reveals evil. It illuminates the truth. Its guiding speaks of the testimony of the saint. When we share our faith, we spread the light.

II. The Explanation –Mt 5:14-15

The first image is that of a city on a mountain in the ancient world. “A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.” Many of the ancient cities were made of white limestone so that, as the sun began to set, its rays caused the city walls to glow and it could be seen for miles around. It was especially helpful for travelers that found themselves on the road at night. With no street lights or lights for traveling, the illumination glow of a city with the tiny oil lamps in every home provided light for their journey. A city on a hill with the little oil lamps in every home could not be hidden.

-The point Jesus is making is that Jesus has put us in a position to be noticed for His glory. FOR LIGHT TO BE VALUABLE, IT MUST BE VISABLE!

-“A city set” means a city placed. It was not there by accident. Plans were made to put that city in a noticeable location. When the Lord saved you and put the light of His own light within you, He put you right where He wanted you to be so that you might be that city that cannot be hidden.

What does light do?

A. Light Influences others

No lamp is ever lighted just for its own benefit. It is lighted in order to give light.

-The phrase "light of the world" was well known among Jews in Jesus' day. It was a title given only to eminent rabbis or teachers.

-As Christians, we are to be teaching and influencing the world for Christ instead of the world influencing us. Phil 2:14-15

We are to be right in the thick of things, shining for Christ, because this world is crooked, dishonest, perverse and perverted. Light reveals truth.

-Darkness impairs vision. In a spiritual sense, darkness impairs a person spiritually. He does not understand the effects of sin. His entire way of thinking is warped by the darkness. His understanding has been switched off when it comes to grasping moral issues related to his own life.

-He may go to great lengths to protect snail darters or endangered fish or animals, but then support abortion of an unborn child. In his mind a snail darter or a mouse or a whale has as much value as a human being that has been made in the image of God. His thinking is warped by the darkness.

B. Light Dispels Darkness

Folks go down into caves, like Mammoth Cave in Kentucky. When I say they go down, they go way down into the cave, so far down that you can fellowship with bats. The guide will say, "I want you to see how dark darkness really is. Everybody back up and stand up so your back touches the wall and don't anybody move. I'm going to turn out the lights." When he turned the lights out, you can see absolutely nothing. Then he turns the lights back on, and the light dispels darkness.

-When Robert Louis Stevenson was a little boy, there were no electric street lights like we have today. Instead they had oil lamps and a man who was a lamp lighter would have a long pole to light the lamps

with. Stevenson as a little boy was mesmerized by the man that was the lamp lighter. His mother asked him one night what he was doing. He said, "I'm watching a man poke holes in the darkness." That's what God has called us to do; to poke holes in moral and spiritual darkness.

Darkness distorts reality. Everything looks different when you try to strain to see through darkness. You hear creaks in the darkness and see things with strange shapes. It's only when you turn on the light that you see things as they really are. Light illuminates so you can see things as they really are.

-Light is comforting. There is something depressing and frightening about darkness.

C. Light Exposes

Some don't like the light. They love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. To some, light is troubling and frightening. Have you ever turned on a light and watched roaches or a mouse run for the cover of darkness? Did you ever turn over a rotten log in the woods and see creatures of the dark run to escape the light. If you could have heard what they were thinking, they would be saying, "Put out the light!"

D. Light Reveals

Light reveals and exposes danger. Darkness covers all kinds of danger. Have you ever gotten up at night to get a drink of water and you didn't know your wife had rearranged things in the house? You can break a leg in your own home.

-Boys and girls who don't know Jesus are in real danger. There are so many things in this dark world that will hurt or destroy our young people.

But there is a positive side to light that reveals:

We are the only Bible a careless world will ever read. We are the sinner's Gospel. We are the Scoffer's Creed. We are the last message written in deed and word. What if the type is crooked? What if the print is blurred? What if our hands are busy with other work than His? What if our feet are walking where sin's allurements are? What if our lips are speaking of things His lips would spurn? How can we hope to help Him and hasten His return?

How are we to shine?

You cannot shine if you do not have God's light within you. Is His light within You? You can't light yourself. Only Jesus can do that.

1. We are to shine naturally

Our light must be real. No artificial light will do. How do roses become so red? What kind of rouge do they use? None, of course. It's their nature to be red.

-Why do birds sing as though the whole world were listening? Are they putting on a show? No, it's the nature of that bird to sing.

-If the light of the Lord is in you, you will shine naturally, and we ought to shine where we are. We use to sing, "Brighten the corner where you are." If we do not shine where we are, then we will not shine at all.

2. We are to shine willingly

There is to be something intentional. If you are a Christian, you are not to be a secret agent believer, working under cover.

3. You are to shine OPENLY.

It is not always easy to shine openly, but that is what God has called us to do.

III. The Exhortation – Mt 5:16

Wait a minute, Preacher. Isn't there a conflict between Matt. 5:16 and Matt. 6:1-2? NO. It is a matter of motive in your heart.

-Jesus does not say, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify YOU and pat you on the back, and give you a gold medal and a loving cup. There is a goodness that attracts and a goodness that repels when the performer seeks self-glory and attention. It is not to be a "Look at Me" attitude.

-The words "good works" means more than only good, it means winsome, beautiful, and attractive. They are to be works of love and charity to others, works of kindness and service, works of humility and gentleness, works for caring for those in need, that will help folks see Jesus.

-Don't hide your Christianity under a bushel – a bushel of apathy, a bushel of fear, a bushel of unconcern.

-Our good works are to be put on a candlestick, well placed.

Perhaps you've heard this poem. It's called "*The Living Sermon.*" It drives the point home with crystal -clarity.

I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day.

I'd rather one would walk with me than merely tell the way.

The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear.

Fine counsel is confusing but example's always clear.

The best of all the preachers are the men who live their creeds.

For to see good put in action is what everybody needs.

I soon can learn to do it, if you'll let me see it done.

I can watch your hands in action, your tongue too fast may run.

The lectures you deliver may be very wise and true.

But I'd rather get my lessons by observing what you do.

For I might misunderstand you and the high advice you give.

But there's no misunderstanding how you act and how you live.

Woodrow Wilson told the story of being in a barbershop one time. "I was sitting in a barber chair when I became aware that a powerful personality had entered the room. A man had come quietly in upon the same errand as myself to have his hair cut and sat in the chair next to me. Every word the man uttered, though it was not in the least didactic, showed a personal interest in the man who was serving him. And before I got through with what was being done to me I was aware I had attended an evangelistic service, because Mr. D. L. Moody was in that chair. I purposely lingered in the room after he had left and noted the singular affect that his

visit had brought upon the barbershop. They talked in undertones. They did not know his name, but they knew something had elevated their thoughts, and I felt that I left that place as I should have left a place of worship.”

That is the kind of light God desires us all to be! If you were to be very honest today, would you have to confess that your light wasn't as bright as it should be? Maybe your heart is like those old kerosene lamps we used as a child. They would get soot on the inside of the glass and the light just couldn't shine through like it was supposed to. But, when we cleaned up the inside, the light came through again.

Jesus and His Bible Matt. 5:17-19

Have you ever wondered about the devotional life of the Lord Jesus? How much time did He spend reading His Bible? How much time did He spend in prayer? Did He believe that the Bible was actually the authoritative Word of God?

-We know that Jesus spent a lot of time in prayer. He would get up long before the sun came up and commune with His Father. But how did Jesus feel about His Bible?

I. Jesus Loved His Bible – 5:17

Jesus mentions the Law and the Prophets. That phrase, the Law and the prophets, means the entire O.T. from Genesis to Malachi. Some say that Jesus is referring only to the Ten Commandments; others say, “No, He is referring to the first five books”, but Jesus is referring to all of the O.T.

-Jesus had great respect and reverence for the Word of God, the O.T. Why?

1. Jesus believed that God was the sovereign Author of the Bible.

In Mark 7:13, Jesus called the O.T. scrolls “the Word of God”. In Matt. 22:31-32, Jesus said that the words of the O.T. were “spoken to you by God.” Inspired of God

-The Bible speaks for itself for it claims to be God's Word over 2,000 times in the O.T. alone. It states that God spoke what is written on its pages.

-The term “the Word of God” occurs over 40 times in the N.T. Prov. 30:5 says that “every word of God is pure”; 2 Tim. 3:15 The Bible is called “sacred”, Rom. 1:2 The Bible is called “holy”.

2. Jesus said that the Word of God is “Infallible” in its totality 5:18 Every jot (the dotting of an “i”) and every tittle (the crossing of the “t”) will be fulfilled. That means that the Bible is accurate down to the dotting of an “i” and the crossing of a “t”.

-Jesus said that God's word is perfect, without human error, and final (Ps. 119:89 - “Forever, O Lord, your word is settled in heaven”). That means God's word is complete - nothing is to be added to it and nothing is to be taken from it. God's Word is Inspired of God; it is God – breathed. God breathed His breath into it. God's word is also totally sufficient for our needs – 2 Tim. 3:16-17.

-The word of God will Accomplish what it Promises – Isa. 55:11.

What is my response to be to the Bible? We should believe it, honor it, love it, obey it, fight for it, preach it, and study it. Today we hear that the Bible is too old-fashioned; it's out of date; it no longer fits our world. Listen: The Bible is not suppose to fit us, we are suppose to fit the Bible! The Bible will never fit our world; our world ought to fit the Bible.

-If there needs to be a change, it's not the Bible that needs to change, it's us!

-God will never change His holy standard because our carnal standard is so low. God will never lower His standard, we must raise our standard to God's standard.

II. Jesus Lived By His Bible – Mt 5:17-18

It's not enough to believe the Bible, we must live according to the Bible. James 1:22

Some in Jesus' day believed that Jesus was trying to destroy or abolish the law or Jesus would have never said that that's not what He came to do.

-He did not come to destroy the Law or to tear it down or to wreck it. He did not come to Abolish the Law, not even to just Enforce the Law with all its legalistic rules, but He came to Fulfill the Law.

Why would some feel He had come to destroy the Law? Let me give some examples:

1. Some were concerned about our Lord's supposed attitude to the Sabbath Law.

The Jewish Law said that no work was to be done on the Sabbath; and yet, Jesus and His disciples plucked corn in the corn fields on the Sabbath. Was He breaking God's Law? Jesus healed people on the Sabbath Day, was He breaking God's Law?

-No. Jesus explained that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.

2. Some were concerned about His authority.

When by the authority of His voice and command, unclean spirits obeyed Him. The people wondered about His authority as it related to the authority of the Law of Moses.

Jesus said that He came to fulfill the Law. How did He do so?

a. The O.T. gave spiritual truth in types or shadows; Jesus brought the types and shadows alive in Himself. Someone said that the O.T. gives us the bud while the N.T. and Jesus gives us the flower.

Notice Luke 24:25-27

-Ps. 23 is not about just any shepherd; it pictures Jesus who is the Good Shepherd and the Great Shepherd and the Chief Shepherd.

-Acts 8:29-35

b. Jesus fulfilled the Law in that He kept the Law perfectly; He obeyed the Law perfectly.

Jesus never sinned by commission, by doing something that was wrong. He never sinned by omission, by not doing something that He knew was right to do. He never sinned in thought or in deed.

-John 8:46 Jesus asked, "Which of you convicts me of sin?" None could. His Actions, His Heart, His Motives, His Mind were all pure.

c. Jesus fulfilled the Law by giving the real meaning of the Law. He gave, not only the letter of the Law, but the Spirit of the Law, the intent of the Law, the deeper meaning of the Law. Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28.

d. Jesus fulfilled the Law by obeying the Law through Love rather than legalism.

The story is told of a woman who was married to a very demanding husband, so much so, that he prepared a list of rules and regulations for his wife to follow. He insisted that she read them over every day and obey them to the letter. Among other things, his "do's and don'ts" indicated such details as what time she had to get up in the morning, when breakfast should be served, and how the housework should be done.

After several long years, the husband died. As time passed, the woman fell in love with another man, one who dearly loved her. Soon, they were married. This husband did everything he could to make his new wife happy, continually showering her with tokens of his appreciation. One day as she was cleaning house, she found tucked away in a drawer the list of demands her first husband had drawn up for her.

As she looked the list over, it dawned on her that even though her present husband hadn't given her any kind of list, she was doing everything her first husband's list required anyway. She realized she was so devoted to this man that her deepest desire was to please him out of love, not out of obligation. God wants us to willingly love and obey Him from the heart. True love and obedience comes from a willing heart.

III. Jesus Lifted His Bible

Jesus applied the Word of God to every situation He faced:

1. Jesus used His Bible when He was doing battle in the wilderness with Satan. After each temptation of Satan, Jesus said, "It is written" and applied the word of God to say why He would not yield to the temptation.

2. He would talk about the manna that God sent His people in the wilderness and say, "I am the True Bread of Life that came down from heaven."

3. He would talk about the brazen serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness as a cure for those who had been bitten by the deadly serpents and say, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up... And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men to me."

4.He would talk about marriage and divorce and talk about what God intended for Adam and Eve.

5.He would speak of His second coming and talk about the days of Noah and Lot.

6.He would speak of His death and resurrection and say, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

IV. Jesus Leaned On His Bible

If you live by the Bible, you can die by the Bible. In the six hours Jesus hung on the cross, He spoke seven times and four of the seven sayings were quotations or allusions to the O.T., the Bible of our Lord.

- He would say, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" and would quote Ps. 22:1.
- He would say, "I thirst" and fulfill Psalm 69:1.
- The saying, "It is finished" culminates all the prophecies of sin's payment.
- "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" was the first prayer a Jewish mother taught her child to pray and was based on Psalm 31:5.

We are not the Son of God, but we are the children of God and God's Word can teach us how to live. Like Jesus, we can meet every temptation with "it is written."

A traveler in South America saw a bird screaming and fluttering high over a tree. Looking closer, he saw her nest of baby birds just below. Below them, slowly coming up the tree, was a huge snake, climbing up to eat the babies. The mother bird suddenly flew away and in a few minutes came back with a branch in her beak. It was from a bush that was poisonous to the snake and she laid it between him and the nest. The snake would not cross it and turned and went back down the tree. Put the Word of God between you and the snake. Answer his foul suggestions as Jesus did, with the words, "It is written."

Let me encourage you to Love the Bible, Live by the Bible, Lift up the Bible, and Lean on the Bible.

Goodness That Isn't Good Enough Matt. 5:20

Before Reading the Passage

D. L. Moody said he was glad we couldn't save ourselves because he didn't want to hear people in heaven bragging about how they got there.

There is no such thing as a self-made man/woman in the spiritual life. You can clean up the outside, but only God can cleanse and change the heart.

That is what Jesus is saying in this verse: Goodness that isn't good enough.

Read the passage:

Why would Jesus say such a thing?

1. First of all the scribes and Pharisees concerned themselves entirely with the external observance of the law and tradition. They cared little about attitude and motive.

a.It didn't matter how much they hated a person, if they didn't actually kill him, they didn't think they were guilty of breaking the commandments.

b.No matter how much they may have lusted, they didn't consider themselves guilty of adultery as long as they didn't commit the physical act.

2. Jesus was saying, "The way the scribes and Pharisees interpret the Law doesn't go deep enough nor far enough."

There must have been many scribes and Pharisees on the Mount that day as Jesus preached.

-They must have reacted – at least inwardly – to His first eight points, or what we call the Beatitudes.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." They were neither poor in spirit nor in material things. In fact, they boasted that they knew the way to heaven better than anyone. But instead of being poor in spirit, they were rich in pride!

Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful" They were not merciful.

-In fact, most, if not all, of the Pharisees there that day would have been stung in the conscious when they listened to what Jesus had to say. Instead of being merciful they condemned those who didn't come up to their supposed standard and were not as good as they were.

-They were salt that had lost its saltiness and lamps that gave no light.

At this point, Jesus names the scribes and Pharisees directly!

We think of the scribes and Pharisees as evil or as hypocrites, but remember that in that day these groups had attained the highest pinnacle of personal piety. The common people thought such righteousness as these groups had was beyond their reach.

There was this proverb in that day, "If only two men were to enter heaven, the one would be a scribe; the other, a Pharisee."

-But the Pharisees were not as righteous as the people of that day thought they were. Jesus called them hypocrites. The truth was, it wouldn't have taken much to reach their level of righteousness.

Here is what Jesus was teaching: The best examples of human goodness and human righteousness is still not good enough to get you to heaven. -Isa. 64:6

-Notice the absoluteness of Matt. 5:20 - "You shall in no wise (case)". That's a double negative in the Greek – No one gets to heaven on their own merits. Only with the righteousness of Jesus!

What is wrong with human goodness/righteousness?

(1) Man is more interested in Rules than Righteousness.

-Man cannot attain God's righteousness, so he begins to whittle down the standards of the law through rationalization and justification.

-Here's how they watered down God's standard of the Ten Commandments and Mosaic law: They added 248 lesser commands to the law; they added 365 prohibitions to God's law; They added 1,521 amendments to God's law. Example:

(a) To make sure they didn't use God's name in vain, they wouldn't even pronounce God's name.

(b) To avoid sexual prohibitions, they would lower their heads when a woman approached and would not even look at her. They got the nickname, "The Bruised and Bleeding" because they would run into objects trying to keep from looking upon a woman.

(c) To avoid defiling the Sabbath, they outlawed 39 activities which might be looked upon as work. (If you got a tack in your shoe, you could not get it out of your shoe – that would be work – nor could you continue walking – that would be carrying a burden)!

(2) Human righteousness is always self-glorifying instead of God – glorifying.

-Luke 18:11-12 "God, I thank you I'm not like other men are." Do you think God hears that kind of prayer – the kind of prayer that asks God to look at how good he is?

The kind of righteousness God is talking about is Divine righteousness; not human righteousness.

-Think of the contrast of human righteousness and divine righteousness the way you think about light:

Human righteousness is like a candle or 30 watt bulb compared to the sun. God light is more radiant than the sun.

-No matter how righteous you are, you always fall short.

-Folks are busy trying to do good things to earn their way to heaven, but human goodness will only take them to hell.

What was the Purpose of the Law?

a. The Law was given to set forth God's eternal standard. The Law can't save anyone...it has no cleansing power...But it does show us God's unchanging standard.

b. To show us we are sinners Rom. 7:7

c. As a teacher to bring us to Christ Gal. 3:24

The Law says, "I can't help you, but I can lead you to Jesus who is the fulfillment of the Law."

4. Jesus said, "Your goodness isn't good enough because it is only external; it doesn't go to the heart.

a. Matt. 23:25-28..You clean the outside of the cup/grave but not the inside

b. When Howard Carter discovered the tomb of King Tut, he found a huge stone coffin with fancy carvings and genuine gold inlay. Inside he found another coffin, this one completely overlaid with gold. Inside that coffin was a third one made of solid gold. And inside that, wrapped in golden cloth, was the King's shriveled old corpse. The whole thing looked beautiful on the outside, but the inside was full of a dead man's bones.

c. It's what's inside that counts!

5. God has always been concerned First with Inner Righteousness

6. If Righteousness doesn't exist in the heart, it doesn't exist.

a. I Samuel 16:7 d. 2 Chron. 16:9

b. I Kings 8:39 e. Prov. 16:2

c. I Chron. 28:9 f. I Cor. 4:3-5

7. You can't behave your way into heaven.

8. Self-righteousness is like trying to fill a bottomless cup. You can never be good enough; never be righteous enough to be accepted by God.

9. Six times Jesus said, "You have heard it said" 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43

A. Your Attitude is equally as important as your Actions – 5:21-22

1. The first crime was homicide (Gen.4:8) Cain rose up against Abel, his brother and killed him.

2. Gen. 9:6 Whoso sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed."

3. Those who heard Jesus must have been in full agreement with capital punishment.

4. Jesus said, "Murder originated in the Heart; not the Hands."

5. Jesus gives the Law a higher standard. Under the Law you would not be legally guilty of murder if it were just in your heart, but spiritually you are.

6. John 3:15

B. Your Desires are equally as important as your Deeds 5:27-30

1. Immorality is in the Head; not just the Bed

2. The word "looketh" means with the purpose of lusting...for the purpose of feeding the inward sensual appetites as a substitute for the act.

3. Billy Graham: "If a man looks at a pretty girl as he drives by, that's normal. But if he goes around the block for a second look, that's sin!"

C. Your language is equally as important as your Life 5:33-37

Keep your word!

D. Your Reaction is equally as important as your Action 5:38-41

Don't just live in justice; but in mercy

E. Live out Love from Above 5:43-45a

David Wilkerson wrote "Cross and The Switchblade." Nicky Cruz began to systematically cut each bottom off his shirt. "What if I cut you in a hundred pieces"..."each piece would cry out Jesus loves you and I love you, too, and I want to see you saved." He said, "I can't fight that kind of love" and he gave his heart to Jesus.

Hell is full of human righteousness.

Paul tried human goodness. At the end he said it was like dung and declared himself to be the chief of sinners. Phil. 3:4-9

The Pharisees asked for more and more obedience; Jesus demanded deeper and deeper obedience.

How can we have righteousness that exceeds the righteous of the scribes and Pharisees? The O.T. Prophets talked about a new heart – righteousness. It was a righteousness that puts God's Law in our hearts and puts God's Spirit within our hearts and the two will coincide. What the spirit does in our hearts is to write God's Law in our hearts. So "spirit," "law," "righteousness" and "heart" all belong together.

-Jer. 31:33; Eze. 36:27

Nothing in my hands I bring,

Simply to thy cross I cling;

Naked, come to Thee for dress,

Helpless, look to Thee for Grace,

Foul, I to the fountain fly;

Wash me, Savior, or I die.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me;

Let me hide myself in Thee.

Heart – Murder Matt. 5:21-22

The first twenty verses of Matthew 5 are general truths. The remainder of Matthew 5 gets more specific. Jesus is going to talk about murder, adultery, divorce, honesty, revenge, and love for your enemies.

-The heart of what Jesus deals with in this section is our relationships with other people. Relationships matter. In fact, relationships test our righteousness. That's why Jesus connected relationships with spiritual reality: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples [spiritual reality], if you have love for one another" [relationships] (John 13:35).

-Relationships are fragile. Relationships are shattered by anger, greed, immorality, selfishness, and revenge. Christians are to prize relationships as they live in right relationship to one another.

-Christianity is a Personal relationship with Christ vertically and with man horizontally.

Obviously, murder is a real relationship killer. It is the first issue Jesus deals with in this section of Matthew 5. It is also the first crime committed in the Bible. Murder was not the first sin, but it was the first social result of man's personal sin.

-We are reaping the bitter fruits of that sin today. There are 25,000 known murders in the United States each year. That is 70 each day. That figure does not include suicides and abortions. We have become the murder capital of the western world.

I. The Explanation – Mt 5:21

Notice the phrase, "by them of old time." Jesus wasn't speaking of the commandment itself, but the particular way in which that

commandment had come to be interpreted or misinterpreted by the teachers and scholars since the ancient times of the Jewish people.

-The ancient teachers had taught the people a mere “letter-of-the-Law” interpretation of the sixth commandment. They taught that if there is no blood shed, then everything is okay. Most people believe the same thing. If you were to ask the average American, “Have you ever murdered anyone?” they would emphatically say, “No!”

-But Jesus would say, “Not so fast!” The Lord is going to show us that murder is not only an act, it is an attitude. In fact, before one becomes a murderer with the HANDS, he first becomes a murderer in the HEART.

-It is possible to have the seed of murder in your heart whether or not you ever actually sow that seed and let it bear fruit. If you have ever been angry at a person, angry enough to have even a fleeting thought of wishing they were dead, you are guilty of heart – murder.

-Murder is not only an external manifestation, but an internal problem.

II. The Exposure – Mt 5:22

The word “I” in Jesus' teaching is the single most important word in the whole of His sermon! It demonstrates to all that He was the King, teaching with royal authority!

-Jesus says, “But I say to you”, as if to say, “You have heard what the ancient teachers have said to you about the commandment, that the commandment deals only with shedding someone's blood, but I say to you that the true intention of the commandment is much more than that alone.”

-God's intention is that we DO nothing, or SAY nothing, or Think nothing, or Wish nothing, that in any way takes away from the personhood or dignity of another.

-We are not to kill another human being by taking his or her physical life; but neither are we to then go on and kill that same person by assassinating his or her personhood. And that, according to our Lord, was the real spirit of that commandment all alone.

-You can be a murderer in your heart without ever committing murder with your hands. There is more to murder than just actually taking someone's life. For example, suppose you want to kill someone and you have the murder all planned out, but at the last moment, you changed your mind. Jesus said you are guilty of murder. Just because you didn't follow through, because you couldn't pull the trigger or because you were afraid of being caught so you decided not to carry out the act, or because something stopped you, does not erase the fact that you had the attitude of a murderer.

God created man in His image and we are to show respect to all men, and as much as is possible on our part, we are to be in a right relationship with all men.

III. The Embryo – 5:22

What causes Heart – Murder? What gives birth to Heart – Murder?

Jesus just didn't want people to refrain from murdering one another. God's concern runs much deeper. God is concerned about what is going on in our hearts.

-What is the embryo, the seed, the root that gives birth to Heart – Murder? Hate, Anger, Bitterness, Resentment, a spirit of Revenge.

Let me say that Jesus does not forbid all anger. It is possible for people to be angry and not sin (Eph. 4:26). In fact, sometimes it is sin NOT to be angry.

-There were times that Jesus got angry, but He was angry at sin and injustice, and He never became angry at personal insult or attack.

There are two Greek words for anger.

“Thumos” is anger which quickly blazes up and just as quickly dies down. It is an anger which rises speedily and just as speedily passes.

We would describe this kind of anger as “flying off the handle.” It is anger that arises out of deep hurt; therefore, it bursts forth with terrifying judgment. “Thumos” anger is never used of God.

“Orge” is long-lived anger. It is anger of a man who nurses his wrath to keep it warm. It is the anger over which a person broods, and which he will not allow to die.

-James 1:20 "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

There are times when anger is called for, but we are to guard against sinning when we become angry. Anger causes us to either react, lash out and hurt others, OR else it motivates us to right wrongs and correct injustices.

1. There is wrong anger that broods, that is selfish. It harbors malice; it will not forget; it lingers; it wills revenge and sometimes seeks revenge.

-There is the anger that holds contempt (raca). It despises; it ridicules; it arrogantly exalts self and calls another person empty and useless. This is an anger that is full of malice. It despises and scorns (raca). Such feelings of anger walk over and trample a person. It says that whatever ill comes upon a person is deserved.

-There is an anger that curses. It seeks to destroy a man and his reputation morally, intellectually, and spiritually.

2. There is right anger or what may be called justified anger. The believer must be an angry person – angry with those who sin and do wrong and who are unjust in their behavior. However, justified anger is always disciplined and controlled. The distinguishing mark between justified and unjustified anger is that it is never shown because of what has happened to oneself. It is an anger that is purposeful. The believer knows he is angry for a legitimate reason, and he seeks to correct the situation in the most peaceful way possible.

Notice that Jesus is not giving stages or degrees leading to murder, but showing the different manifestations of the same heart attitude.

Anger: may manifest itself in lashing out, verbally or physically attacking someone. There may also be what has been termed passive – aggression, in which the angry person may say nothing ugly, but treats the other person with personal contempt. It may result in the silent treatment.

-Anger often shows up in the spousal relationship in which one spouse may demonstrate anger at the other by silence, lack of kindness and gentleness, failure to show tenderness and concern. They may look for ways to show animosity as much by what he does not do as by what he does.

Anger blinds us to Reality – we don't see the person we're angry with in their true light.

For example: If we are angry at someone and we do not deal with the anger, we begin to build up resentment and bitterness for the person. The result is, we are just not able to think clearly when we get mad at someone. It's easy for us to jump to conclusions about the person or to make slanderous accusations toward the person because of our own inner anger. In our eyes the person we are angry at can never say or do anything right. Some invent lies or exaggerate their weaknesses.

-This happens sometimes in churches and it becomes a form of Christian aerobics. We RUN from the truth, JUMP to conclusions, Stretch the facts, and THROW insults. We get angry with someone and lose all perspective about them and start making up all sorts of lies to tell about them.

-Harbored anger and unforgiveness in our hearts can pollute our hearts for years if we don't deal with it. World War II ended in 1945, but the bombs of that war are still killing people. Every year hundreds of bombs are recovered across Europe. It has been nearly 70 years since World War II ended, but in 1994, at least 13 old bombs exploded in France, killing 12 and injuring 11 others. Over time, corrosion makes bombs more unstable and therefore more dangerous.

-Anger toward someone works the same way. Like a bomb hidden in one's heart, it lies there for years, corroding the soul. It has a polluting effect on our spiritual lives. Sometimes the anger will rise up for no apparent reason and cause a terrible outburst or reaction. I've been around angry people and had to be careful because I never knew what was going to set them off.

Three times in 5:22, Jesus says that those who are angry "Shall be in danger of". Jesus doesn't say that those who harbor anger in their hearts will automatically experience these judgments, but that they are in danger of experiencing them.

The Power of Spoken Anger

"Raca" is name – calling and verbal insults toward another. Example: Fred Sanford: "You big dummy."

"Fool" is ugly spoken words that insults another with a desire to get rid of someone who stands in your way. "Fool" in Jesus' day would be like saying, "Go to Hell" today.

We treat the damage we do with our lips very lightly because we do not see the corpses we leave behind.

Jesus insists that the gravest thing of all is to destroy a man's reputation and to take away his good name. No punishment is too

severe for the malicious tale-bearer, or the gossip which murders people's reputations. If a Christian is guilty of this kind of behavior, don't be surprised when he or she is severely chastened by the Lord.

Mat 12:35 A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

Mat 12:36 But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

Mat 12:37 For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

(1Jn 3:15) Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

Something More Important Than Worship Matt. 5:23-26

Before Reading the Passage

God places a high premium on worship and praise unto Him.

-Ps. 29:2 - "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

-Ps. 150:1,6 - "Praise ye the Lord! Praise God in His Sanctuary ...Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord."

-The whole book of Leviticus was written to instruct the Jews in the proper way to worship the Lord.

-Hebrews 10:25 warns us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together for worship in the last days.

-Then, there is to be private worship between us and our God. But here, Jesus said that there is something more important than worship. The truth we are about to read must be an extremely important one for Jesus to put it before worship.

Read the Passage:

You will remember that Jesus has just talked about heart-murder. It is not just the act of murdering someone, but it is also the attitude of hate and anger that God sees, and if murder is in our hearts, God writes it down as murder whether we committed the act or not.

-Many people believe that they can continue to harbor resentment and bitterness in their hearts toward a brother or sister in Christ so long as they are faithful in their attendance, their service, and their gifts to God.

-Jesus says, "Not so". Jesus clearly points out that it is far more important to be reconciled to your brother than to fulfill the external duties of worship. Worship is merely make-believe if we have offended others in such a way that they are holding grudges against us.

-Having a clear conscience is a priority in the Christian life. We must make sure our lives are right with God and right with men, because we cannot be right with God until we are right with men.

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

Jesus offered a plan to move people from alienation to reconciliation. The only way to get over anger is to forgive. The only way to heal broken relationships is to seek reconciliation with the offender.

-The Lord gave a simple way to deal with anger. First, we remember exactly what happened. Next, we drop what we are doing and seek reconciliation. Finally, we give glory to God for His grace and forgiveness.

I am convinced that some folks ought not to be in church trying to worship. They ought to be off getting right with their brother or sister in Christ.

-The devil doesn't care how pious you and I look sitting in church as long as there is discord in our hearts toward a brother. I say again, no man can be right with God if he is consciously wrong with his brother.

-1Jn 4:20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

We would be surprised to know how often and how much the Spirit of God is quenched by folks who are not right with their brother.

-It doesn't matter how prayed up and prepared the preacher may be, if one brother is at Odds against another, God is hindered from working. No matter how beautiful the music is, if one brother is not right with another brother, worship is hindered.

-Every preacher knows how important it is for those he is preaching to to be right with each other; yet, several years ago I was in revival in a nice size church in Alabama. The revival started on Sunday morning and we had a great service. The pastor and the people were excited about what God did in the morning service and they expressed that they were looking forward to what God was going to do the rest of the week. We had a church-wide lunch in the Fellowship Hall and I sat next to the pastor. He turned to me and said, "That was a great service. What are you going to preach on tonight?" I told him that I felt the Lord would have me preach on the very passage I'm preaching on now; being right with your brother; being reconciled with your brother. He suddenly turned pale and said, "Please don't preach on that tonight or any time this week. If you do, I'll have to leave this church." It was the only time a preacher had ever asked me not to preach on a passage of scripture. I wrestled the rest of the afternoon with what I would do. He told me what had happened between himself and a member of the church. I tried to get him to go to the man and get it right, but he refused. It is the only time in my ministry that I did not preach what God had clearly lead me to preach. He said before each service, "Please don't preach on getting right with your brother." It was very obvious in each service that God's Spirit was being quenched and there was no other movement of the Lord during the revival. I promised God that I would never let anyone else talk me into not preaching what God clearly laid on my heart to preach. That has been over ten years ago, and God still deals with me about my wrong decision about not preaching what He wanted me to preach.

-Psalm 66:18 As long as we have intentional sin in our hearts and lives, outward acts of worship are not acceptable to God. There is a lot of vain worship and singing and praying and giving.

I want to leave four words with you:

I. Remembrance Mt 5:23-24

Most of us don't have much trouble remembering hurts. We often hold on to grudges, refusing to let them go. Yet, the only way we'll be free from the hurt is to obey the pattern given by our Lord.

-If we fail to deal with the wrong, more people will end up being hurt. The old saying, "Hurt people, Hurt people" is true. Someone who is hard to get along with and constantly doing or saying things that hurt other people is most likely a person who has been hurt and has refused to deal with it.

Jesus gives an illustration: A man is coming to the temple to offer his free-will offering to God. He's thinking that nothing is wrong. He thinks that he's doing his faithful religious duty – just as those do who faithfully attend Church, or put money in the offering plate, or listen to "long sermons" without complaining. But then – right in the very act of performing his religious duty – he remembers something! (Isn't that the way it is? Whenever we truly seek to draw near to God, He lovingly, but gently, causes issues in our lives to come up that had – to that point – remained undealt with.) And so, as this man was bringing his gift to God's alter, he then remembers that a brother has something against him.

-I believe that the "something" should be seen in the context of what Jesus says in 5:21-22. Maybe as the man approaches God's holy throne, the Holy spirit brings to his mind anger toward a fellow believer and he has refused to let the anger go. Maybe God reminds him or name-calling or a slander or some resentment he has toward another. God causes him to stop and recall that he is guilty of "heart –murder" and now he dares to stand before God's holy presence. How could a Holy God receive the gift of such a man, until he repents of his heart-murder?

Do you have a hard time forgiving others?

-Sam Jones said, "I had a hard time forgiving folks until I decided I would not fall out with anyone unless they treated me worse than I treated Jesus Christ."

-General James Overthroup told John Wesley, "There is someone I will never forgive." Wesley said, "Then I hope, sir, that you never sin."

-An unforgiving spirit is unforgivable! Matt. 6:14-15

Jesus points to both sides of the issue. In Matt. 5 He said, "If you remember that someone has something against you, go to them. "If you have something against someone else, go to them.

(Matt. 18:15-17, 21-22, 35).

II. Refusal

Twice in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "Refuse to worship until you get things right with your brother." This must be an

extremely important principle for the Lord, since He places it ahead of worship. We cannot really participate in worship if our hearts are full of hate and anger.

-It's a terrible thing to enter church with a heavy heart and be unable to experience the joy of worship because of unresolved anger. The only way to regain the power and joy of worshipping God is to resolve the situation with the other person.

Two great principles come out of this passage: It is always the right time to be reconcile AND it is always my turn.

I must tell you: "It cost to forgive. There are no bargain pardons. To forgive means to absorb the hurt and pain yourself and refuse to bring the hurt and pain up again to the forgiven person."

III. Reconciling – Mt 5:24; Rom. 12:9-10, 14, 17-21

Reconciliation demands courage, generosity, and strength of character. One of the hardest things to do is to humble ourselves before someone we are angry at. Yet, that is exactly what Christ calls us to do.

-That will mean giving up the hurt and the thoughts of revenge we have harbored. No matter who is at fault, if we recognize there is a problem, it is our responsibility to seek reconciliation. We must do everything we can to try and make it right, and we must count on God to work in the heart of the other person. I am not responsible for how the other person responds to me, but I am responsible for my own behavior.

A civil war historian named Myers writes that in 1913, the Federal Government held a fiftieth anniversary reunion at Gettysburg. It lasted three days. Thousands of survivors bivouacked in the old battlefield, swapping stories and looking up old comrades. For the most part, the old men got along well enough, but over dinner at a restaurant one evening, harsh words were passed between a Yankee and a Rebel and they went at one another with forks: "unscathed in the battle of 1863," Myers wrote, "One of them - and I never learned which - was almost fatally wounded in 1913 with table hardware!"

The climax of the gathering was a re-enactment of Pickett's Charge. Thousands of spectators gathered to watch as the Union Veterans took their positions on Cemetery Ridge, and waited as their old adversaries emerged from the woods on Seminary Ridge and started toward them across the long, flat fields. Myers wrote, "We could see, not rifles and bayonets, but canes and crutches. We watched as the more agile men aided those who were not able to maintain their places in rank. As the Rebels got nearer to the northern line, they broke out in one final, defiant rebel yell. It was then that the Yankees, unable to restrain themselves any longer, rushed from behind the stone wall and flung themselves upon their former enemies - not in mortal combat, but re-united in brotherly love and affection.

-Reconciliation not only involves seeking forgiveness, but also granting forgiveness to those who have wronged us.

In a Peanut's cartoon, Lucy said to Snoopy: "There are times when you really bug me, but I must admit, there are also times when I feel like giving you a big hug." Snoopy replied: "That's the way I am - huggable and buggable." The truth is, that's the way most of us are. Scripture teaches us that we should not only forgive those who wrong us, but to love them.

Notice 5:25-26 There is an urgency to reconcile. We are to nip the problems in the bud quickly, before more trouble piles up. Bitterness breeds bitterness. Take immediate action to mend the relationship

IV. Return – Mt 5:24b

D.L.Moody said that the most difficult sin to deal with in the life of a Christian is the sin of an unforgiving spirit. This sin, more than any other, is keeping Christians from having power with God.

We are to worship God with a clean heart.

Myself

I have to live with myself, and so

I want to be fit for myself to know;

I want to be able as days go by

always to look myself straight in the eye;

I don't want to stand with the setting sun

And hate myself for things I've done.

I don't want to keep on a closet shelf
A lot of secrets about myself;
And fool myself as I come and go
Into thinking that nobody else will know
The kind of man I really am;
I don't want to dress myself up in sham.
I want to go out with my head erect,
I want to deserve all men's respect;
But here in the struggle for fame and pelf,
I want to be able to like myself.
I don't want to think as I come and go
That I'm bluster and bluff and empty show.

I never can hide myself from me,
I see what others may never see,
I know what others may never know,
I never can fool myself – and so,
Whatever happens, I want to be
Self-respecting and conscience free.

Hidden Lust Matt. 5:27-30

Your mind is an amazing and powerful thing. Inside your mind you can take and develop pictures of things you have never seen or of places you have never been.

-Use the imagination of your mind with me for a moment: Imagine a large gray elephant standing on its hind legs with its trunk in the air, balancing a large red and white beach ball on the end of its trunk. Can you see it?

Now, imagine the Twelve Disciples of Jesus out in the midst of the sea at night, and the rain starts to fall heavily and the wind begins to blow, and the Disciples are being tossed all over the ship. They are afraid and you can see fear on their faces and hear fear in their voices. Then, suddenly, Jesus walks up to the ship – walking on the water with the waves all around Him. He speaks three words: "Peace be still"; And the rain stops and the winds cease and there is perfect peace. Can you see it?

God gave us our imaginations so we could dream dreams and be successful and attempt great things. Our imagination can be used for redemptive purposes, but like all the good things God gives us, it can also be used for evil. There is a dark side to our imagination. A wicked imagination can pervert the soul.

Jesus has just dealt with the sixth commandment, which prohibits murder. Now, He will deal with the seventh commandment, which deals with adultery. Jesus deals with the spirit of the Law, which not only deals with the ACT or DEED of murder, but with the ATTITUDE or DESIRE of the heart. If a person is angry in his heart at a person, God looks at and judges the heart, and He sees it as murder. The letter of the Law is external, but the spirit of the Law is internal.

What Jesus said about murder is also true about adultery. The external act of adultery is sinful, but the internal desire is also sinful. God looks at and judges the heart. If there is adultery in our hearts, he writes it down as adultery.

You see, God wants us to be clean on the outside and the inside. You and I cannot avoid all temptation. Sometimes wrong thoughts

slip into our minds and we can't help it, but we don't have to make friends with those thoughts or secretly enjoy them.

-Jesus is telling us that, if we think we have kept God's commandment against adultery simply because we have never physically cheated on our spouses, or because we haven't had sex with the spouse of another, then we are badly mistaken.

-The spirit of the commandment, "You shall not commit adultery," is one that reaches down to our very hearts. It involves not only what we do with our bodies, but also what we look at with our eyes, or dream about in our fantasies, or lust after in our wills.

Let's look at Jesus' words in this passage and consider some principles:

I. The Instruction Jesus Gives – Mt 5:27

The phrase, "You have heard that it was said by them of old time," refers to the interpretation of the commandment by the scribes and Pharisees. They went only by the letter of the Law. To them, only the act of adultery would break the commandment.

-They might have said, "I'm not committing adultery! I haven't touched anyone!" But apparently they

hadn't considered the seventh commandment in the light of the tenth. The tenth commandment – the one that forbids "coveting" – says, among other things, that "you shall not covet your neighbor's wife." Even if a man doesn't actually touch his neighbor's wife; if he gazes at her and wishes he could, or fantasizes what it would be like to do so, he is not only breaking one commandment, he's breaking two – one in the letter and one in the spirit.

What is adultery? Let me give you some synonyms for the word, "adultery." "To make impure, to corrupt, to cheapen, to contaminate, to violate."

-Adultery is a violation of the marriage vow, or covenant of faithfulness between a husband and wife; a vow or covenant that was made before God and with each other. Any ...any sexual experience outside the marriage bond is adultery.

-Think about this: There is no greater expression of trust than for a man and a woman to stand before each other and proclaim and receive and accept the pledge saying, "And forsaking all others, I will cleave only unto him/her."

Steve Farrar, in his book, Pointman, writes: "Let's cut the double-talk. Let's put the cards on the table. Let's call adultery what it is. In the war on the family, adultery is treason. But we don't call it treason. We have developed a more refined and sophisticated term. Adultery has become an "affair". When a man leaves his wife and children for another woman and acts as impulsively as an aroused junior high kid on his first date, it's not an "affair." It's adultery. An affair – that word has a sort of nice, light – airy ring to it. It certainly isn't a judgmental term like adultery, The word "affair" is fluffy and non-threatening. When I was a kid, I used to go to a fair. We would have a great time eating cotton candy, riding the Ferris Wheel, and playing games on the arcade. When you went to a fair, you left all the responsibilities of normal life behind, at least for a few hours. Life was a lot of fun a lot of fun at a fair. Maybe that's why we call adultery an affair. It's leaving behind you responsibilities." (p. 55)

II. The Injunction of Jesus

The word for "adultery" is broader than just impurity between two married people. It includes all sexual impurity – adultery and fornication. Here is God's plan for purity:

1. Heb. 13:4

"Let marriage be held in high honor or in high value or high priority."

-"The bed undefiled" or "allow nothing to stain, color, or spot the intimate, exclusive relationship between husband and wife."

2. I Corinthians 6:18

Our world says, "Practice safe sex." Sex was never meant to be dangerous, and if we followed God's plan, there would be no AIDs or STDs.

-The world says, "Use protection", but if you are immoral, nothing will protect your heart and mind.

3. I Thess.4:3-8NLT

It is God's will that you practice abstinence until marriage.

-If you want to have a good marriage, one of the best things you can do is commit yourself to abstinence until marriage. Here are some reasons not listed in the Bible why you should practice abstinence until marriage: You will not be afraid of contacting sexually transmitted diseases. You will not fear getting pregnant. You will not go through the trauma of an abortion. You will not have to get

married before you are ready. You will never have to give up your baby for adoption. You won't be overwhelmed by guilt. You will protect the specialness of a relationship that belongs only to marriage. You will know in your heart that you are in the will of God.

Here's what happens when one yields to infidelity : Secrets must be kept. You have to practice deceit, which always leads to self-deception. You feel you must lie to those you love and trust. Inner integrity is gone because you were not faithful to yourself. You will have to come up with ways to cover-up and conceal your impurity. Others are always hurt.

III. The Insight From Jesus – Mt 5:28

“You have heard that it was said...But I say unto you” Jesus is exercising His divine authority to correct the teachers of the Law and give the full meaning of the command.

-We can commit murder with our anger, heart , and words; and, we can commit adultery with our eyes, our hearts, and our minds. Jesus is talking about unlawful sex outside of marriage.

Jesus is not talking about an incidental or an involuntary glance. It is not wrong to look at a woman

admiringly. He does not forbid the natural, normal attraction that is part of our humanity. He is not forbidding us to Look at a woman, but to Look Lustfully. We all know the difference between looking and lusting.

Jesus is talking about an Intentional and Repeated gazing. It is intentional looking with the purpose of lusting; with the deliberate intention to lusting after her.

-Jesus condemns the man who deliberately uses his eyes to awaken his lust in such a way that passion is awakened and evil desire is deliberately stimulated. It is when one uses his imagination to fantasize about having sex with a woman; even though it is not expressed physically.

-Adultery begins in the HEAD; not the BED. Jesus is saying, “Don't turn what you see or think into lust by keeping it in your mind or secretly enjoying it or making friends with it.

-Jesus' teaching shatters a concept I've heard put into words by some men: “It's alright to look as long as I don't touch.” No it's not. Don't look in lust and don't touch!

Lust treats a person like a throw – away object. It ignores the personhood of another person when it takes a person without their consent and uses them for self-gratification in their minds and then throws them away. It robs the other person without them even knowing it most of the time.

One of Satan's most destructive tools is pornography. One can get hooked on porn. It is like a drug for the mind. Never before has sexual fantasies been so available as they are in our day in the form of pornography. Scientific evidence proved that pornography is as addictive as cocaine or heroin, going directly to the pleasure center of the brain. And once the images are in the mind, they are replayed again and again and it is almost impossible to get them out of the mind. Proverbs 6:27

We usually apply this passage to men looking and lusting after a woman. But we must apply the spirit of the command and that would involve women as well.

-It is just as sinful for a woman to seek to “draw” that look. Sometimes women deliberately and knowingly dress (or not dress) in a provocative way or to engage in flirtation as to attract sexual interest in themselves.

-If a woman dresses in a provocative manner then she is guilty of affecting men's imaginations that lead to adultery in the heart. That does not mean that the man is not responsible for his lust, for he is.

-Ladies, it is one thing to make yourself attractive, it is another to make yourself deliberately seductive. You ladies know the difference; so do we men.

-Solomon describes the tactics of a woman who tries to draw a man to herself. Proverbs 6:20-21, 24-29, 32-33 How many men have been killed because he went after another man's wife? (How many men have lost all their earnings in trying to keep up an adulterous relationship?)

IV. The Illumination of Jesus – 5:29-30

Jesus is clearly speaking figuratively. He isn't commanding us to literally gouge out our eyes and cut off our hands. What would happen if someone tried to deal with their lust that way? First, one eye would go; then off would come a hand. But since the other eye can still look, the guy would have to use his one good hand to gouge out the other eye. But what's he going to do to get rid of the other hand? Ask for help? A man could keep chipping away at himself until he was all gone; and he would still not solve the real

problem. Our eyes don't cause us to sin. Our hands don't cause us to sin. The real problem is the lust in our hearts.

Self-mutilation is not the answer. Jesus is not telling us to cripple ourselves, but to control ourselves. What do we need to do?

1. Admit you thinking is wrong.

Don't make excuses or give alibis for your wrong thinking. God will never cleanse an excuse or an alibi, only sin.

-People try to excuse adultery by saying, "My spouse is unresponsive or unattractive or boring or unfaithful. No, you are responsible for your sin.

2. Control your eyes

We are commanded to control our eyes repeatedly throughout scripture.

-Job 31:1 (NLT) "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look with lust upon a young woman."

3. Don't feed your fleshly nature. Starve the flesh. Rom. 13:14

Watch what you watch! Be careful what you look at. Behave as if you had actually plucked out your eyes and were now blind and could not see those things that once caused you to lust. Behave as if you had actually cut off your hands and feet and do not do the things or visit the places which previously caused you to sin.

4. Guard your thought life – Phil. 4:8 Ps. 51:10, 139:23-24

-Ask God to help you with your thought life.

-We often fall on our knees AFTER we lose a battle. We need to fall on our knees BEFORE we face our battles and temptations.

5. Don't try to resist sexual temptation. Be a coward and turn from it. Don't flirt with disaster! It's much easier to avoid temptation than to resist it. -2 Tim. 2:22

Jesus Teaches on Divorce Matthew 5:31-32

Our Lord teaches with purpose and plan as He preaches this Sermon on the Mount. He begins by giving us eight general principles, telling us how we can be blessed. The rest of the sermon deals with specifics. Jesus has talked about our responsibility to be salt and light in this world. Then He talks about worship and the importance of being right with our brother if we want to worship aright. He talks about looking upon a woman with lustful desire for her and how God sees a lustful heart as adultery. Adultery in a marriage often leads to divorce, and that's what Jesus deals with in these verses.

What Jesus deals with here as He talks about divorce is as up – to – date as today's world. Nothing has done more to undermine family life today than the Divorce Revolution.

-The United States has about five percent of the world's population, and, yet has one-half of all divorces in the entire world. Divorce was once abhorred and was extremely rare; now it has become the national norm. We have become so pessimistic about marriage, that fifty-nine percent of all Americans believe it is a smart idea to draw up a prenuptial agreement just in case the marriage doesn't last.

-The heartbreak is how divorce is now being viewed and practiced by American Christians. According to George Barna, born-again Christians are as likely as non-Christians to get divorced and the Christian denomination with the highest likelihood of getting divorced, are Baptist.

-I sat down not long ago and listed the couples who have gotten divorced from our church since I came as pastor and I listed twenty couples. Not one of those who divorced attend church here now.

Now one wins in divorce. Divorce is an aborted marriage. Our day is a day of throw – away marriages and tossed – away kids. Nothing hurts like a divorce.

Doris Golberg of Rochester, MN. Wrote this prayer after her divorce: "I have lost my husband, but I'm not supposed to mourn. I have lost my children; they don't know to whom they belong. I have lost my relatives; they do not approve. I have lost his relatives; they blame me. I have lost my friends; they don't know how to act. I feel I have lost my church; do they think I've sinned too much? I am afraid of the future, I feel ashamed of the past, I am confused about the present. I am alone, I feel so lost. God, please stay by me,

you are all I have left.”

Marriage is supposed to be a permanent relationship, not a temporary assignment that we can quit if we don't like it.

Divorce is a very sensitive subject. So many people that we know and love have been personally affected by divorce and remarriage.

-For many, the subject of divorce brings up painful memories, deep personal losses and deep regrets.

-This is a sensitive subject, but remember that it is being taught to us by our wonderful, loving, forgiving Savior. There isn't anyone who could teach us about this subject with more grace and gentleness than Jesus. Jesus only desires good for those who love Him; and He's always ready to forgive us of our sins, pick us up, dust us off, and help us to go on in His life-changing grace.

While Bible students have interpreted these words of Jesus in various ways, there are at least three things we know for sure.

I. Marriage is Permanent

Malachi 2:16 says that God hates divorce (KJV – Putting away.) There is no question about God's attitude on divorce: He hates it. He doesn't hate divorced people, but He hates divorce.

-The reason God hates divorce is because He recognizes the pain it causes. The Lord doesn't want to have children shuffled back and forth between families, or have His people struggle with the pain of broken vows.

-God loves us – that's why He hates divorce. He wants us to know the joy that can be ours if we follow His covenant and keep our commitments. The Lord hates anything that can destroy our lives.

-God's plan is that marriage is to be permanent. To break up the marriage is to corrupt the plan of God. God hates divorce because it is not best for us, but He allows for it because we are a fallen race.

Have you ever stopped and looked at God's wonderful plan and design for marriage?

1. In the first place God knew that it was not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18). Man without woman was incomplete.

2. God designed that male and female be joined together in marriage. Notice that God created Adam and Eve; not Adam and Steve! God designed a “help meet” for Adam. The word “help meet” means a counterpart for Adam; a companion, a completer, one to compliment him, and an equal.

-God makes sure we understand that His design was to join together male and female (Gen. 1:27; 5:2) to accomplish His mandate to “be fruitful and multiply.” Neither one could produce offspring without the other; both are inadequate without the other.

-When God brought Eve to Adam, Adam said, “This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man.” In this poem Adam names his newly found companion: Woman means “the soft one; the delight of my heart. As such, Adam will protect her, provide for her, prize her.”

-Male and female will be “joined together” and become “one flesh”. They will be “joined” in a permanent or indissoluble union, so that divorce was not considered.

-Male and female will be as one and implies their sexual completeness, and the child born of that union will be the perfect result of the union of two.

3. God gives some safeguards for the marriage relationship.

a. We must be wise in our choice of a marriage partner.

-Believers and unbelievers are not to be “unequally yoked” or joined together in marriage. Why? Because the believer and the unbeliever are not of the same nature and it is impossible under such an arrangement for things to be done for God's glory.

-The joining of a believer and an unbeliever is disobedience, and God does not honor our disobedience. It is not God's will for your life. Believers are free to marry “only in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39).

b. There must be a “leaving” and a “cleaving” . Gen. 2:24

That does not mean that our responsibility to honor our parents ceases when we are joined together as husband and wife, but does mean that there is to be a new and primary responsibility to the one we are joined to. This is an important safeguard to keep in mind as parents as well as for those who are joined as husband and wife.

-The “cleaving” also means that the couple must have eyes for each other alone.

c. The safeguard and permanency is also seen in the command of Christ, “What God has joined together, let no man separate.” Never be a party to coming between in any way that couple who is joined together in the Lord.

d. “Til death do us part” is not just a catchy phrase, it is the divine will for marriage. Determine that you will work through difficulties. You will have them. Everyone does. You did not pack a parachute when you walked down the aisle and committed yourself to one another. There is no bailing out. Leave divorce out of your vocabulary completely. Do not view it as an option. Marriage is a serious commitment.

II. Divorce is Permitted – Mt 5:31-32; 19:3-9

Matthew 19:3-9 is a companion passage to Matthew 5:31-32. Jesus was asked if it was permissible to divorce one's wife for just any reason. There was a big debate during that time on causes for divorce. The Shammai school of rabbinic thought considered that some type of impurity was cause for divorce, while the Hillel school took a broader view – that most any displeasure that a man had with his wife would be cause for divorce. So, if she burned the toast or had a bad hair day, he could literally sue for divorce.

-Jesus very quickly sided with the Shammai school of thought. He taught that, because marriage is a divine institution in which God intended to be made permanently. We should not divorce for trivial causes.

-Jesus would not and could not sanction “quicky” divorces or divorces because of incompatibility or personality clashes or differences in lifestyle choices; nor because of financial pressures or unpleasant habits.

The Pharisees were preoccupied with the GROUNDS for divorce; Jesus was preoccupied with the INSTITUTION of marriage.

-The Pharisees were interested in the legal aspect of divorce. Their mentality was the same as our mentality: If it's legal, then it must be right. The easy way out of any marriage was simply a bill of divorcement. The only thing the Pharisees were concerned with was that they did the necessary paper work!

-The attitude of the Pharisees was the same as the attitude today concerning marriage: It's easier to get out of marriage than it is to work through the problems in a marriage!

-The Pharisees were totally focused on divorce; Jesus was preoccupied with marriage. When trouble comes, we ask: “How can we get out of it?” Jesus says, “You should be asking, “How can we stay in it?”

-Couples today look at a marriage license and say, “Well, it's just a piece of paper!” But a marriage license is more than just a piece of paper; it is a sacred covenant between you and God that you will be married for life.

-So what does Jesus say? It's pretty simple. *Either marry for all of your life or do not marry for all your life!*

The quotation regarding a “certificate of divorce”, comes originally from Deut. 24:1-4, and was given to restrain the frivolous, thoughtless, and rash dismissal of a wife.

-It was a deterrent to divorce, not an encouragement for it. The “certificate” was proof that she was not an adulterer, for adulterers were to be stoned. Instead, her divorce was due to the whims of her husband. The “certificate” protected her from criticism and abuse.

-Many men in Jesus' day were using the “certificate” to quickly get rid of one wife in order to take another. It was nothing more than instrument to promote adultery. To violate the marriage vow in order to take another woman as a wife- regardless of the “certificate of divorce” - was nothing short of adultery.

Having made the point that the marriage relationship is to be permanent, “til death do us part,” we must consider the famous “exception clause.”

-Most folks think this is the main point of the passage, but not so. It is true that Jesus tells us when a divorce and a remarriage may legitimately occur, but the main point is to teach us that we are to imitate God's own example of commitment in a covenant bond of love.

-God is a God of faithful love. He is God, who enters into a bond of love with His people; and he is faithfully committed to that bond of love forever. Even if His people forget or ignore that bond, He Himself never does. He is always true to it.

Did you notice that Jesus CORRECTED what the Pharisees said about divorce? They said, “Why did Moses COMMAND to give a certificate of divorcement and to put her away?” Jesus answered, “Moses...PERMITTED you to divorce her because of the hardness of your hearts, but from the beginning it was not so.”

Just because one mate has been unfaithful doesn't mean you MUST divorce. In fact, God gives us an example of forgiving, redeeming, love. God instructed Hosea to marry a woman that would turn out to be unfaithful to him. His marriage to Gomer would illustrate God's committed love for His people.

-In time Gomer bore Hosea a son. Not long after that, Gomer bore a daughter, but Hosea was not sure it was his daughter. After that, she bore another son, and Hosea KNEW this was not his son. In fact, he named him, "No Son of Mine!" Think of the heartbreak when Hosea introduced his family:

This is Gomer, and my first son, that I named, "God scatters," for he was to serve as a sign of God's impending judgment for Israel's sin, and this may be my daughter, named "No Mercy", and then the other boy, I've named, "Not Mine." After that, Gomer left Hosea to become a harlot. She was selling herself as a slave to any man when God told Hosea to go get her, buy her off the slave block, and love her and forgive her and treat her as though she had never wronged him.

Remember that Jesus is teaching the Spirit of the law not the letter. This "exception clause" is an act of mercy from God toward those who are trapped in a situation in which one's spouse is aggressively and habitually violating the marriage vow.

-Nothing hurts more than betrayed love. Often times divorce is more difficult to deal with than death.

-If a Christian's spouse has become involved in an adulterous relationship, and there is repeated unrepentant failure on their part, the innocent party is free to divorce. The Bible doesn't say they SHOULD divorce, only that it is permissible.

-I have known couples who have worked through one partner's infidelity and remained married. The person who committed the sin repented and asked forgiveness, and over a period of time, healing took place and the marriage was bonded together again. Nothing can shatter a marriage relationship like infidelity, but the grace of God is strong enough to make it right again if there is a spirit of repentance and a desire to be restored.

-However, if the husband or wife is involved in infidelity and refuses to repent, the Lord says that the innocent party is free to divorce. I think the Lord was very careful in approaching this topic because adultery is a sin which affects many people. Oftentimes when we sin, our actions only involve ourselves. But in divorce, there are always two people affected, and often children whose lives are affected. The rules Christ laid down for divorce are given to protect those who have not violated the marriage covenant.

Paul gives us another reason for which divorce is permitted: Desertion or abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor. 7:10-16).

If you feel you've lost your love for your spouse, let me tell you this story. A woman came to a counselor on time and said, "I cannot stand my husband, and I want to be as mean to him as I can." The counselor replied, "All right, if you want to really be mean to your husband, here's what I want you to do. Go home and tell your husband that you love him. Do everything possible to prove it. Do things that you've never thought to do for him before, and then, when he's convinced you love him more than anybody else in the world, tell him you do not love him at all and you want a divorce." She said, "That sounds great; I'll do it." In a few weeks she came back with a report that she had followed her counselor's advice. The counselor said, "Great, now you can sue him for divorce." The woman looked at him and said, "Are you crazy? I've fallen in love with my husband for the first time in years, and our marriage is more beautiful and happier than its ever been!" Try it! It will work for you, too!

III. Remarriage is Possible – I Cor. 7:8, 12-15, 39

One biblical purpose for divorce is so that the innocent person can get remarried. All my life I have heard people in churches say things like, "She may have been justified in being divorced, but she can never be remarried." That's absolutely incorrect. If a man was biblically justified in getting divorced, he is automatically justified in getting remarried. Through His wonderful grace, God has provided a second opportunity for those who have been bruised and beaten in an unfortunate relationship. God has often made it possible for those who have followed the biblical pattern to meet someone new and go on to a happy and joyous relationship. To argue that all divorced Christians are prohibited from ever remarriage is simply not in accord with scripture.

Let me give you some principles for protecting your marriage.

- 1.If your marriage is good, you ought to Thank God. Never take your good marriage for granted.
- 2.Don't judge those who are struggling or who have been divorced. We have no right to look down our noses at anyone, for we could be in the same spot if not for the Grace of God.
- 3.If your marriage is developing trouble, get help now. Don't wait until your marriage is all but beyond help before you seek help. Nothing is as expensive as divorce.
- 4.If you are planning to get married, start praying. The key to a great marriage is for Jesus to be Savior and Lord in both of the lives of the couple. Most divorces start before the wedding ceremony. Marriages that start in a hurry often end in a hurry.

5.If you are violating God's Laws of Fidelity, stop it now. The good news is that God can heal a marriage. He can restore relationships. He loves us and wants to protect us from harm. By His grace, He can put the most broken lives back together.

To Tell the Truth Matt. 5:33-37

Did you know that the Bible says that we are all born liars (Ps. 58:3)? If you are a parent, you know that you do not have to teach children to lie, you have to teach them to tell the truth.

We are living in a deceptive society. There was a time when a man's word was considered his bond. That is no longer true. We are told today to get everything in writing. Man's word is no longer good enough.

-Do you know of any sin that is more prevalent than lying? Today we have color-coded and sized lies. We tell white lies and black lies. We tell "just a little lie" and we tell "whoppers".

-We have become so savvy at reshaping the truth to our own advantage. We put a spin on something and we twist the truth to suit our own purposes. We use double talk and speak with a forked tongue. We lay down smokescreens or embellish the truth. We have mastered the fine art of being evasive or we get caught up in exaggeration. Why don't we all just speak honestly, simply, and plainly? Why must we lie, cheat, deceive, and shade the truth? Jesus said that we are to let our "yes" be "yes"; and let our "no" be "no". Say what you mean and mean what you say!

The truth is, we expect some folks to lie. We even make jokes about lying.

-Who is that car salesman who comes on with all of his car deals and ends by saying, "I don't lie to you!"

We have become so convinced that politicians and lying go together that it's become one big joke. I heard about a bus full of politicians that was speeding down a country road when it swerved into a field and crashed into a tree. The farmer who owned that field heard the noise and went to investigate. He then dug a gigantic hole and buried all the politicians. A few days later the sheriff drove by and saw the overturned bus. He knocked on the farmhouse door, and when the farmer came to the door, he said, "Sir, where are all the politicians who were in that bus?" "I buried them." The Sheriff said, "Were they all dead?" The farmer said, "Well, some of them said they weren't, but you know how politicians lie."

Over 1,000 Americans from across the country were asked this question: "What do you want in a President?" They gave each person a detailed list of 74 leadership traits they could choose from. By far away, the highest percent of those interviewed, 79%, said the single most important attribute they wanted in a President was honesty. That same group was asked if they believed the President was honesty. That same group was asked if they believed the President was truthful. Only 8% said they believed the President was truthful and only 3% said they believed congress was truthful.

I believe the worst thing that can ever be said about someone is this: "You can't believe anything he says."

-You think about it. Would you hire someone if they had great skill, if they dressed nicely, if they had good personalities, if they worked well with the public, but you could not believe anything that they said? Of course you wouldn't, for that type of person causes trouble and stays in trouble, and you can't trust them.

Jesus IS Truth! He doesn't just tell the truth, He IS Truth. The Bible says that "God is light, and in Him is no darkness (no deceit, no falsehood) at all."

-Our God is the God who cannot lie: Numbers 23:19; Joshua 23:14; I Sam. 15:29; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:17-19 64

-As His followers, Jesus is calling us to be people of the truth – people who say what we mean and mean what we say. Stop and think how much suffering is caused in this world because people make promises in the sight of God, and yet lie, or do not remember them, and so fail to keep them.

-If everyone were to suddenly keep the vows they make on their wedding day, what would happen to the divorce rate? How many acts of adultery would there then be? How many members of broken homes would suffer?

-Or if everyone were to keep their promises in business, how many corporate scandals would you read about? How many lawsuits would there be? And what would all the lawyers do?

Two things I want you to see from this passage:

I. Our Lord's Appeal – Mt 5:33-36

The companion passage for these verses in Matt. 23:16-22

What does Jesus mean when He says, "I say to you, do not swear at all?"

-Have you ever uttered an oath? Have you ever verbally bound yourself to do a thing or fulfill a promise – calling upon God to bear witness to your words or pledge before God?

-If you're married, then you certainly have; because you were asked if you pledge yourself for life to your husband or wife before God and witnesses, and were called upon to respond verbally by saying, "I do."

-It's interesting that Jesus' words on taking oaths follows right after His words about not putting away one's husband or wife!

Some have been called upon to make a vow in a court of Law to tell the truth. The President takes the Oath of office. If you have been in military service, you have taken an oath to defend our nation.

God, Himself, has taken an oath. He has sworn by His holiness (Ps. 89:35), He has sworn by Himself (Isa. 45:23), He has sworn by His right hand (Isa. 62:8), He has sworn by His great name (Jer. 44:26).

-Then what did Jesus mean when He said that we were not to swear or take an oath? He was referring to frivolous or evasive or dishonest oaths; not legal oaths.

The Pharisees had devised a system which obeyed the letter of the Law, while ignoring the Spirit of the law. Their desire was to give the impression they were telling the truth, when in fact they were being purposefully deceitful. On top of that, they made God a partner in their deception by using His name as part of an oath in order to deceive others.

-They would make promises or vows, then fail to keep up their end of the bargain on the basis that they had not made a proper vow. For example, in modern day language it would be like saying, "As God as my witness," and then tell a lie. When confronted with failure to fulfill the vow, the Pharisees would argue, "I used the name "Jehovah" for God and not the name "Yahweh," so it wasn't a binding vow."

In other words, the Pharisees were playing word games with the truth. When I was a kid we used to have a little trick that we would use when we wanted to lie. We would put our hand behind our back and we would cross our fingers. Well, this was their way of crossing their fingers. It was more than just being dishonest, it was being deceptive. What was worse, they weren't even accomplishing their purpose of getting God out of the picture. Because Jesus said, "If you swear by heaven, it is God's throne; if you swear by earth, it's His footstool; if you swear by Jerusalem, it's His city; if you swear by your head, He's the one who put the hair on your head to begin with."

-They thought what they were doing was real slick, but truth has no shades whatsoever. In God's eyes a half truth is a whole lie.

Jesus is talking about more than honesty here. He is talking about integrity. Integrity is saying what you will do, and then doing what you say you will do.

-A "vow" is a solemn promise or pledge before God or before men; and an "oath" is a pledge to do what you have promised will be done. It is keeping promises and fulfilling expectations.

When someone swears or takes an oath, it is usually done to verify that what they are saying is true. It is used to strengthen a statement or to affirm what has been said. It is intended to add credibility to what they have said.

-We often do what the Pharisees did when we swear. We say things like: "I'm swearin' to God that this is true"; "So help me God"; "I swear to you on a stack of Bibles"; "If I'm lying I'm dying"; "Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye."

-If you constantly need to rely upon some form of oath or swearing or promising in order to be believable, I automatically figure you're not telling the whole truth.

-Our character ought to be such that when we say something, folks ought to be able to say, "If he says it, you can take it to the bank."

-The Pharisees made oaths that allowed them some wiggle-room in case they didn't want to keep the oath. Their "yes" didn't exactly mean "yes" and their "no" didn't necessarily mean "no". A person had to try and figure out when he was being told the truth and when he was being deceived.

To our Lord, a man's words are sacred and he will be held accountable for what he says. A man's speech represents the man

himself – Matt. 12:36-37

We need to take great care to either speak the truth or not speak at all. You need to be honest in your speech, but you don't always have to express your honesty. Some people pride themselves in being

“brutally honest.” Many times I've found folks like that to be more brutal than they are honest.

-A woman was trying on different dresses at the mall. She found one dress in particular she just loved, but she was afraid it might make her look too big. Well, her husband was shopping with her. She said, “I need your opinion on something.” She went into the dressing room and got into this dress and came out and turned this way and that, and said, “Does this dress make me look fat?” The husband said, “No, honey, that dress doesn't make you look fat. It's your hips that make you look fat.”

Truth is the highest thing that we may keep. We need to be honest in church. Perhaps there is no place where we posture more than in church. The unrighteous act righteous. The proud act humble. We don't want anyone to know what we're really thinking. We come to church, dress up nicely, sing all the songs and pretend everything is wonderful. A woman may be dying inside, but won't let anyone know it. A man may be struggling, but pretends everything is fine.

We lie when we say more than we know. When we gossip about what we have heard and not what we know; no wonder someone called a gossip “the devil's postman.”

II. Our Lord's Admonition – Mt 5:37

Jesus is telling us two things: Be faithful to keep the vows you make to the Lord. Ecc. 5:4-5

Secondly, jealously guard your words so that you speak truthfully.

-We must remember that the Lord hears every word we speak, and that we will give an accounting for those words.

-We must also remember that our words are important in giving evidence of our relationship to Christ.

-God hates lying. Satan is the fountain of all lying. We are never more like the devil than when we lie. - John 8:44; Prov. 6:16-19; 12:22

It's a discipline to tell the truth. We are born liars, so telling the truth is a learned skill. If we never tell small lies, we won't have to start a pattern of lying in order to cover up the lies we've told. When we are careless about the truth, we establish a pattern that we have to follow in the future. Before we know it, lying has become a lifestyle.

-I've known people who lie so much they don't even know what the truth is anymore. They have used

so much deception they've begun to believe themselves.

Jesus says this isn't a complicated issue. Just tell the truth. Decide that from today forward, you will be a person of your word. God has given each of us a conscience, so that we can be reminded whenever we are tempted to tell a lie. Remember the words of Jesus in John 8:32 : “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Releasing Our Rights Matt. 5:38-42

We live in a country where we are obsessed about our rights. Movements have been developed for civil rights, women's rights, worker's rights, prisoner's rights, and even animal rights.

-We insist on our rights, even if insisting on our rights sometimes tends to trample the rights and the welfare of others – James 4:1-2

The world says, “Fight for your rights. Fight back and get revenge if you don't get your rights.” The unsaved society says that you are weak or cowardly if you do not fight for your rights.

-We want our rights at the workplace, in school, in the home, and even in churches.

-Yet, the instructions Jesus gives to His followers goes against the grain of what the world says when He gives us the proper response when one is personally wronged. How is a Christian who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit supposed to react to personal offenses?

Jesus Himself gave us the example to follow. Paul points us to the example – Phil. 2:5-11

-Jesus knew what He would face as He would give Himself so we could have redemption and forgiveness of sins. The Prophet Isaiah put it like this: Isa. 50:6; 53:3, 5, 7

-Think of Him for just a moment as our example: He had the authority to call forth twelve legions of mighty angels to come to His rescue in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:53), but He refused to make use of this authority. Instead, He allowed Himself to be laid ahold of and led away by those who were going to crucify Him (v. 57). And though He could simply speak the word and cause a whole detachment of guards with torches and weapons to draw back from Him and fall to the ground (John 18:3-6), He willingly allowed Himself to be struck on the face unjustly (18:22-23), and remained silent before His accusers (Mark 14:61). When the Roman soldiers crucified Him and gambled for the only possessions He had left in this world – the very clothes on His back (Matt. 27:35), and as the Jewish leaders mocked and ridiculed Him as He hung on the cross, He didn't stop them. Instead, He prayed that His Father would forgive them (Luke 23:24). There He hung on the cross in complete humility and injustice – dying for you and me. Peter tells it like this: I Peter 2:21-24

-How different is our attitude in the times in which we live. As I hope you can see, our wonderful Savior and Lord doesn't ask anything of us that He didn't do Himself.

Notice four principles to which Christ calls us in these verses:

I. How are We to Respond to Injury and Insult – 5:38-39

You and I choose to live on one of three levels.

- Some return evil for good – The Demonic Level
- Some return Good for Good; Evil for Evil – The Natural Human Level
- Others return Good for Evil – The Divine Level

Where did the phrase “eye for an eye” come from? It is an exact quotation from the O.T. Passages (Ex. 21:22-25; Lev. 24:19-20 – blemish means disfigurement; Breach means fracture; Deut. 19:21)

-This is known as the Law of Retaliation. This was intended by God as a legal code that was to be enforced by civil authorities and not by individuals. It was not given for an individual Hebrew to take vengeance upon his fellow Hebrew.

This O.T. Law was not given to ENCOURAGE retaliation; rather, it was given to REGULATE RETRIBUTION; so that, in the pursuit of justice, injustice was done. It prevented someone from going beyond the boundaries of justice in avenging themselves against someone who had wronged them.

-The 8th Amendment of the United States Constitution states: “Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishment inflicted.” It protects the offender in that the punishment was to be equal to the crime, and no more.

-God knows human nature and knew that people would want to retaliate at a greater level than they had been hurt. If someone had lost one eye, they could not take two eyes as punishment. If they had lost one hand, they would not be able to take both hands. It is a way of regulating or limiting retaliation.

I do think if the Law of Retaliation was properly administered by a judiciary, it would go a long way to bring back civil behavior to our nation's streets. The principle calls for punishment in a more exacting way. Rather than too harsh a punishment or too light a punishment, governments should have the responsibility to determine a just recompense for a crime and carry it out.

Now, in 5:39 Jesus shifted from civil responsibility to that of the individual believer.

-If someone slaps you on the right cheek, if he were right – handed, that would mean that he slapped you with the back of his hand.

-To be slapped speaks of being greatly insulted and is a very demeaning thing. It means to be disrespected and it assaults your personal sense of dignity.

How should we respond to such a thing?

-Please understand that Jesus is not telling us to be a doormat for folks to walk on. It does not mean we are to offer no opposition to evil men when they threaten our families. If a woman is being raped, she is to defend herself and fight off her attacker.

It will not happen very often, if at all, that anyone will slap us on the face, but time and time again, life brings us insults, either great or small, and Jesus is saying here that the true Christian has learned to not resent and seek retaliation for insults and abuses.

-When Jesus spoke of being slapped on the right cheek, He was describing especially an insult that comes because of one's faith. What Jesus is saying is that when we are insulted or abused for Christ sake, we must not respond by becoming bitter and getting even. Jesus call us to swallow our pride and give up our rights to retaliation and personal vengeance.

-Romans 12:17-21

It is not easy to turn the other cheek.. It takes spiritual discipline and a lot of God's gracious restraint. I was put in a confrontational situation one time in which I was insulted and disrespected. This man had treated other pastors the same way. I must tell you that it took a great deal of God's gracious gift of restraint for me not to respond in a fleshly manner. Especially when I know I could squelch him like a bug! It took a much bigger man for me to exercise restraint than it would to have whip the man.

-Let me show you what it does when you show restraint: It places the offending person in a position in which he must consider his actions; and that invited him to be the one to bring an end to the conflict.

-We are not to trade insult for insult we are to look for a way to respond in love.

Sometimes we think we are turning the other cheek, when in essence we are not. A truck driver dropped in at an all-night restaurant in Nebraska. The waitress had just served him when three arrogant leather-jacketed motorcyclists entered and rushed up to him and tried to pick a fight with him. One grabbed the hamburger off his plate; another took a handful of his French fries; and the third picked up his coffee and began to drink it. The trucker didn't respond as one might think. Instead, he calmly rose, picked up his check, walked to the counter, put the check and his money on the cash register, and went out the door. The waitress watched out the door as the big truck drove away into the night. When she returned, one of the cyclist said to her, "Well, he's not much of a man, is he?" She replied, "I don't know how much of a man he is, but he's not much of a truck driver. He just ran over three motorcycles out in the parking lot." He wasn't much for turning the other cheek either!

II. How Are We to Respond to Injustice – Mt 5:40

In 5:38-39 we have an example of us being wronged; here is an example of us being in the wrong. We are at fault. These times do come, don't they? We are guilty and we must pay the damages. We must respond by trying to right the wrong and doing so in a Christian spirit.

-The Jews wore two principle garments, an interior (the coat) and an exterior (the cloak or mantle). The Law concerning the garments is found in Ex. 22:26-27

-If a legal judgment is fairly made against us for a certain amount, we should be willing to offer even more in order to show our regret for any wrong we did and to show that we are not bitter or resentful against the one who has sued us. This would not only show the love of Christ, but it would also help in defusing the anger of the other person with us.

III. How Are We to Respond to Inconvenience – Mt 5:41

Simon of Cyrene was something of an example of this, when he was forced by soldiers to carry the Savior's cross (Mark 15:21).

When the Roman Empire captured a new province or town, a Roman yoke was put in the market place or on the principle gate. Sometimes they made everybody pass under the yoke and sometimes they made everybody pass under the yoke and sometimes only the leaders, thus signifying to the Roman Empire they would give obedience or tribute whenever a Roman Soldier wanted them to carry his pack for a mile. A Roman mile was 1000 paces, and it was a must. Jews had set up mile markers in every direction of their home so they would not go one step further than they had to go.

-To give you an idea of how the Jew hated to go that mile, think how it would make you feel if Afghanistan conquered America and you had to submit to them in such a way.

-Jesus was saying, "Walk the first mile without resentment, and walk another mile without resentment, also. DO MORE THAN IS EXPECTED OF YOU AND DO IT IN THE RIGHT SPIRIT .

-If you are asked to do some distasteful duty, do it with a Christlike attitude.

IV. How Are We to Respond to Inadequacy – Mt 5:42

Don't get a calloused heart toward those who need help. Always be ready to listen and respond the way Jesus would respond. And give what is needed as soon as you know there is a need.

Make sure you give to what is needed; not what is wanted. Don't give in such a way as to encourage a person to be lazy. Nor should we give something that will lead to his hurt, like money he may spend on drugs. Don't give to further their sin.

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Ro 12:2)

Loving Your Enemies Matthew 5:43-48

A pastor was preaching one Sunday morning on the subject of “Forgiving your Enemies. After a long sermon he asked how many were willing to forgive their enemies. About half of the people raised their hands. Not satisfied with the response, he preached another fifteen minutes and repeated his question: “How many are willing to forgive your enemies now?” About eighty percent raised their hands. Still not satisfied, he preached ten more minutes and repeated the question. With the thought of Sunday lunch in mind, all responded except one old gentleman in the back. “Mr. Jones, are you not willing to forgive your enemies?” Mr. Jones replied, “I don’t have any..” “Mr. Jones, that’s very unusual. How old are you?” He replied, “I’m eighty-six years of age.” “Mr. Jones, please come down to the front and tell the congregation how a man can live to be eighty-six not have an enemy in the world.” The old man teetered down the aisle and slowly turned around and with a smile, he said, “It’s easy, Preacher. I just outlived them all.”

Our Lord’s command to love and pray and do good to our enemies and to show them mercy, is the pinnacle of our Lord’s teaching so far in His sermon.

-Just as Christ loved those that nailed Him to the cross, praying, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” even so, he calls upon His followers to do the same. As kingdom citizens, we are to demonstrate love to ALL MEN, just as Jesus Christ loves us.

-It would be easy if we only had to love those WE choose to love, or those we wanted to love, or those that loved us back. But we don’t have a choice if we are going to be God-like. We are to love without discrimination.

It was March 4, 1865, in his second Inaugural address, just a little over a month before he would be assassinated, Abraham Lincoln uttered those immortal words: “With malice toward none; with charity for all.” It was at that time in our nation’s history when America almost did to herself what no one else had been able to do – destroy her. Though the war was over, the battle was not. Bitterness, ranker, and anger was still in a fever pitch in our country. But Lincoln knew something that Jesus will teach us in these verses; that only love can cure the wound of bitterness between those in conflict. But it is more than just an ordinary love; it is a supernatural love that only God can give.

Four things I want to share with you from this passage:

I. The Re-interpretation – Mt 5:43-44

Jesus has been following a pattern. He would state a specific law that the Pharisees would teach from, and then He would show how their interpretation was not complete. The Pharisees would teach the “letter of the law”, but they would miss the Spirit of the law.

-Here, Jesus says that the Pharisees have made several mistakes. In the first place, they misquoted the law; then they reduced the law; then they omitted something from the law; and finally, they added something to the law that was not there. Here, Jesus actually quoted their mistakes!

The first half of the quotation is from Leviticus 19:18, but with parts left out. Leviticus 19:18 is quoted in the N.T. by Jesus (Matt. 22:36-40), Paul (Romans 13:9), and James (2:8). It is the most often quoted O.T. Text in the N.T. It is called the second great commandment.

1.They reduced the meaning of the command by limiting who their “neighbor” was.

-They limited their “neighbor” to mean only their Israelite brother, and certainly not a Gentile sinner.. The Gentile did not believe in the Lord; he was therefore to hate them as his enemies. And, he felt quite spiritual in doing so, and was fully convinced in his mind that his hatred of the Gentiles was just as pleasing to God as loving his family was. In other words, the Pharisees taught that it was okay to be bigoted and to be prejudiced. And, they used the Bible as an ally of their hate and to condone their sin.

-They went even further. They limited their “neighbor” not only to Jews, but to “good” Jews; Jews like themselves.

2.They omitted two words: “as yourself.”

-They conveniently left out “as yourself,” because that part makes us reflect on how we care for ourselves. Loving others “AS YOURSELF” brings love to a new standard. In omitting that phrase, the Pharisees took much of the power from the command.

3.They added something to the law that was not there: “and hate your enemies.”

-That last clause is nowhere to be found in the O.T. In fact, it stands in direct opposition to God’s intention.

- Prov. 24:17 Do not rejoice or gloat when an enemy stumbles or falls
- Ex. 23:4-5 God instructs His people to help his enemy when he is in trouble.
- Prov. 25:21 If your enemy is hungry, give him something to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.

The letter of the law asks, “How much do I HAVE to do?” Love asks, “how much CAN I do?”

When the missionary Sam Elliot was killed by the Auca Indians, in just a short time after that, Sam's wife, Elizabeth Elliot, and his sister Rachael Saint, went back to the same people who had brutally killed their husband and brother, to teach them the gospel. How do you love someone that has robbed you of your spouse and left your infant daughter fatherless? You don't do it by natural means. Grace alone can so overcome the natural tendencies of hate and revenge so that a believer can love those they thought impossible to love.

II. The Requirement – Mt 5:44

Two questions come to mind: (1) “What exactly does Jesus mean by my 'enemies' ?” and (2) “What does it mean to 'love' them?”

(1)What exactly does Jesus mean by “my enemies”? They are who the ones who:

A. Curse you

That is, they slander you; they speak lies about you; or they curse you out to your face; most probably because of your association with Christ.

B. Hate you

That is, those who harbor resentment and bitterness toward you, again because of your association with Christ; those who wish you ill will.

C. Spitefully use you

That is, they take advantage of you; They capitalize on opportunities to exploit you and cause you loss in some way.

D. Persecute you

Again, they seek to cause you harm in some way.

(2)What does it mean to love our enemies?

Jesus spake with authority: “Love your enemies.” That sounds like a contradiction in terms. How can “love” and “enemies” be put together in the same sentence? The nature of enemies is that we hate them or want harm to come to them.

We all remember the scenes in the streets of Palestine on the day our nation was attacked by terrorist. Horns were blaring, people were cheering, Palestinian flags were waved, US flags were burned, toasts were made, and all the while people in the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were struggling to escape the fate of death. We were considered the enemies. So they rejoiced greatly at our loss and sorrow. We condemned such a spirit – and rightly so. But do we have the same mentality toward our enemies?

We face an interesting dilemma during this period of our nation. Can we both love our enemies and support our soldiers seeking to root out terrorism and bring those guilty of the 9/11 attack to justice? I believe the scriptures teach that we must do both.

-Jesus didn't deny that justice must take place in a fair and just way. Yet, the attitude of our hearts, even toward those who hate us and want to see us dead, must be one of pity and compassion for their souls. Justice and the protection of our nation's citizens are the responsibility of our civic leaders. We have a God-given duty to support them.

-We must not hate those who hate us. We must pray for them. We must ask the Lord to show us ways to point them to the only Savior of sinners.

-To love the unlovable, we must perceive something worthy of that love. That attitude begins only when I am able to recognize how unlovable I am and, yet, my Savior was still willing to lay His very life down for me because He loved me that much and He wants His love for me to be my model for loving those who do not deserve my love any more than I deserved His (Rom. 5:8)!

The love spoken of here is Agape love. It is a love that loves without expecting love in return. Agape love doesn't necessarily mean you “like” someone or that you “feel” a certain way toward someone, but is a choice of the will. Agape love is the right thing to do.

We don't feel a certain way; we do certain things.

You cannot command a feeling or an emotion, but you can command an action. If we wait for a feeling, we will never love our enemies. Love is a verb. We are to act a certain way toward the unlovable.

III. The Responsibilities – Mt 5:44

How do you manifest love toward your enemies? We do not love their methods, their morals, or their ways, but they have a soul that God can save and a heart that God can change. We do that by the way we manifest love toward them. How do we do it?

A. We are to BLESS them.

Ask God to bless them when you pray. In your confrontations, respond with gracious words that are a blessing to them.

-They may slander us or curse us, but we need to speak something that commends them or praise them or to say something good to them and about them.

B. We are to DO Good to them.

Love finds a way to do something to meet their needs, like feeding them if hungry or giving them water to drink if they are thirsty.

C. We are to Pray for them.

Jesus doesn't say pray ABOUT them, but to pray FOR them. Pray that their eyes will be open to see the folly of their ways. Pray that they might find mercy before the Lord. Pray that they might hear and understand the Gospel and be saved.

-Praying those kinds of prayers consistently for our enemies will change our whole attitude toward them. We will long to see them changed and transformed by the power of the gospel of Christ.

IV. The Reason – Mt 5:45-48

"That we may be the sons of our Father in Heaven" is not telling us HOW to become one of God's children, but our actions will clearly identify us as children of the Father.

Jesus gives divine examples –Mt 5:45

Think about this: The Sun shines on Afghanistan just like it shines on America. It rains in Iraq just like it rains in America. God gives air to Muslims just like He gives air to Christians. God sent Jesus to die for the terrorist just like He sent Jesus to die for the diplomat.

Notice 5:46-47 If you only love people who love you back; if you're only kind to people who are kind to you; if you only treat people the way they treat you, you're no better off than a pagan or an unbeliever.

-You may as well understand, no matter how good you try to be to others, some people are going to be mean to you. Somebody – somewhere - at sometime – is going to do you wrong.

-Life is fair! Everyone is going to suffer. Everyone is going to get hurt. Everyone is going to be done wrong.

Notice 5:48 Jesus is not talking about being perfect in life, but being perfect in our love.

-The word "perfect" means "mature." It means to reach the end for which you are intended. For example: An oak tree is the mature perfection of an acorn. An acorn is intended to mature into a mighty oak. When it comes to the enemies you make in life, have a love that is so mature and so strong in the Lord Jesus Christ, that through Him, you can love even your most bitter enemy.

-We are to pursue perfection in a progressive way: "With malice toward none; with charity toward all."

Religious Exhibition or, Sunday Is Not Showtime! Matthew 6:1-5, 16-18

In Matthew 5, Jesus taught us what it looks like to practice true righteousness. He now teaches us to practice this righteousness in the right way and with the right motives.

-The focus of Matthew 5 was with regards to what other people can see; but the focus of Matthew 6 is with regard to what only God can see.

-The focus of Matthew 5 was on our outward behavior with respect to practical acts of righteousness. The focus of Matthew 6 is on our inner motivations before God.

We live in two worlds. We live in a world of PERCEPTION and we live in a world of REALITY.

-For almost 30 years, Rock Hudson was the favorite matinee idol of movie goers. Rock Hudson spent his entire life creating a perception that he was the world's leading man for women. In all of his movies he portrayed that kind of man that women would just fall on their face before. He was the great lover, and any woman would be privileged to have Rock Hudson as a lover. That was the perception. In reality he was a homosexual, and he died of a horrible disease transmitted to him because of his homosexuality. The perception was that he was a ladies' man. The reality was that he was a man's lady. He played the part. He created the perception. He pretended to be something he was not.

I don't like to be around braggers, do you? Some folks just seem to enjoy tooting their own horn. They want to be noticed by other folks. Jesus put it like this in 6:1, "to be seen of them"; in 6:5, "that they may be seen of men"; in 6:16, "that they may appear unto men."

-I don't like to be around braggers; and what is really bad, is to be around spiritual braggers.

-Three times in these verses, Jesus called the Pharisees who acted this way, "hypocrites" (6:2,5,16). Jesus uses the Greek word that we get our word "theater" or "theatrical" from. Don't be theatrical! Don't put on a show! Don't pretend to be something that you are not.

-The real you is what only God sees. Robert Redford was walking through a hotel lobby one day and a woman saw him and followed him into the elevator. With great excitement she said, "Are you the real Robert Redford?" As the doors of the elevator closed he said, "Only when I'm alone." The real you is what you are and what you do when nobody sees and nobody know but God.

-We might as well admit it: We've all done some things, hoping others would notice. All of us have put on little "prime-time" performances. At times all of us are all "talky-talky and no walky-walky".

-Jesus is the only Person to use the word "hypocrite" in the N.T. He is the only one who sees us in secret. I may say that you are a hypocrite, and I may be wrong. You may say that I am a hypocrite, and you may be wrong. But when Jesus says a person is a hypocrite, you can write it down.

Jesus deals with three acts of righteousness that are valued by almost every religion, and shows how we abuse them by displaying self. In each one of these we sometimes "parade self" and say, "Look at me!"

-It's part of our fallen, sinful nature, isn't it, to have the tendency to do good works in such a way as to make sure others see us doing them. We have a strong desire for recognition and to draw attention to ourselves.

-If you don't believe it, let someone do something "for the Lord" and fail to recognize them. Or, maybe, let a group of folks be involved in something and a word of appreciation is given and a list of the folks is given, but you leave their name off the list.

The hardest type of hypocrisy to spot is not in someone else. It is in us. We can quickly spot wrong motives in someone else, but just as quickly make excuses for similar motives in our own lives.

-Sinful motives can slip into our lives when we may not even realize it. On one occasion, the Apostle Peter had been enjoying fellowship meals with the Gentile believers at Antioch. But when a group of strong-minded Jews (Judaizers) came into Antioch, Peter withdrew from the fellowship with the Gentiles, separated himself from them. Paul confronted Peter to the face and said his actions were hypocrisy because he did not want the Jews to see him fellowshiping with the Gentiles. Yet, after Paul was caught up into the Third heaven, Paul himself said that God gave him a thorn in the flesh so he would not be exalted beyond measure, for he saw things in that experience that he should not speak of.

Listen as Jesus deals with three acts of righteousness:

I. Giving: Concern for Our Fellow Man – Mt 6:1-4

Jesus expects every believer to give. Notice that Jesus says WHEN you give; not IF you give. Faith and finances go hand-in-hand. Giving is good for us and blesses others. Our God is a giving God and He wants His followers to identify as one of His and follow His example of giving.

-What Jesus deals with here is not THAT we give, nor WHAT we give, but WHY we give. We can do the right thing in the wrong way. Our giving is wrong:

A. When We Give For the Public – Mt 6:1-2

“Do not do your alms before men” and “Don’t blow a trumpet” as you give. In other words, Don’t advertise what you are giving; Don’t call attention to what you are giving.

-There is no record of trumpet blowing like this in Jewish society, but there was a way the Pharisees drew attention to themselves when they gave. In the temple were 13 receptacles where contributions could be made. Each of these was like a big chest, with a funnel-like opening – very similar to an old Victrola record player. The Pharisees were famous for taking their gifts and exchanging them for the most coins possible. Then they would stuff all those coins into their aprons and pockets, go into the temple court, and start tossing coins into the funnel. The sound of all those coins clanging down through the funnel would echo all over the courtyard, impressing everyone present. Even if it wasn’t a big gift, it would “sound” impressive. It would be the equivalent of taking a hundred dollar bill to the bank, exchanging it for rolls of pennies, then dropping them one by one into the offering plate. Everybody would notice, it would take a long time, and the impression would be that you had given some huge gift to the church.

-Jesus says, “When you give, do it sincerely, spontaneously, and secretly.

B. When We Give Out of Pretense – Mt 6:2

Some give, just to play the religious part of giving, but their heart is not in it.

-Mark Twain’s wife was tired of his cursing, so she tried to shock him into quitting by letting out a long string of curse words. Twain said, “Honey, you got all the words right, but your heart isn’t in it.”

A lot of Christianity is like that.

C. When We Give For Praise – Mt 6:2-4

“Don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” speaks of secrecy. Don’t draw attention to yourself when you give.

-Notice that there is a reward for giving to the Lord. But if you do the right thing the wrong way, there will be no reward from God. All you will receive will be a pat on the back and the applause of men, but expect nothing from the Lord.

-Col. 3:17; Heb. 6:10

II. Prayer: Contact with God – Mt 6:5-8

Jesus expects us to give, AND He expects us to pray. Again, it is not IF you pray, but WHEN you pray. But there is a right way and a wrong way to pray.

-The Pharisees often prayed merely to be seen by men and to have everyone think highly of them. The Pharisees loved to pray standing on the corner where they could be seen or pray their long, fancy prayers in the synagogue to impress people.

-There is nothing wrong with standing and praying, but the word Jesus used in this passage literally means “to strike a pose.” In other words, they would assume some dramatic position in order to be noticed and appear somehow more spiritual. Sometimes we do that today when we use our spiritual voice or our special prayer voice that sounds loud and sanctimonious.

-Here’s the question: “Are we praying for men to hear, or for God to hear?” No wonder Jesus says to go to our secret place. If we pray in our secret place, no one is there to be impressed by our flowery words. God alone sees and hears. If our heavenly Father hears, that is enough! He is not interested in the SIZE of our prayers or the VOCABULARY of our prayer or the WORDINESS of our prayer, but He does care if we come to Him in dependence upon His righteousness, casting ourselves upon His resources, and looking to Him in faith to hear and answer our prayers.

-We need to have the faith and positive spirit of the little boy who yelled to his family down the stairs, “I’m fixing to say my prayers! Does anybody need anything?”

III. Fasting: Control of Ourselves – Mt 6:16-18

Fasting is doing without food for a period of time so that you can do business with God; usually in the area of repentance and asking God to right a wrong.

-Often God’s people fast in order to express humility before the Lord and to show an earnest desire for the Lord to work in a particular way. It involves denying self for the purpose of seeking God’s face.

But fasting is never to be used for drawing attention to one’s self. The Pharisees took a beautiful expression of devotion and

sacrifice and made it ugly by doing it to be seen of men.

-Twice a week, on market days, Monday and Thursday, when more people could see them, they fasted. They wore ugly disheveled clothes, neglected bathing, left their hair disheveled, and whitened their faces so they would look pale because of lack of food.

-Fasting is a voluntary thing that is to be done in silence; without fanfare, without drawing attention to yourself, and without announcing or bragging about. It is not to be publicized to advertise your spirituality.

-I heard a man preach one time of fasting who said that he had just finished a 40 day fast. He looked like he weighed 350 pounds and didn't look as if he had missed many meals.

Let me say that fasting is not for everyone: some with medical conditions should not fast.

-Some who do fast look down their self-righteous noses at those who do not fast. We must never sit in judgment of each other when it comes to fasting. Fasting is to be between God and the believer.

One fine Christian said, "When I fast, I don't become God conscious; I get food conscious.

Three times Jesus says, "Your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (6:4,6,18).

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, our Lord will bring to light many saints who are unnoticed and unknown by most folks, but He sees their faithfulness and their love for him and who have stood tall for Him.

After years of crusades the Billy Graham Team learned of a little lady who followed them from one crusade to the next. She never went to a crusade, but she would rent a motel room and pray for them while the crusade was going on. When Mr. Graham's Team found out about her, the entire team went to meet her, including Billy Graham. Mr. Graham asked permission to begin paying for her expenses, renting her rooms, providing her meals, putting her in a place of honor. Billy Graham said that she had been a great source of encouragement and was responsible for much of the success in the crusades. They put her in a place of honor because she did not put herself in a place of honor. Instead, she put herself in the position of a humble servant. She was not interested in the praise of men; only the praise of her Master.

Getting Ready To Pray Matthew 6:5-8

I heard about a pastor who would call the children down to the front of the church every Sunday morning and give them a children's sermon. One Sunday morning he brought a telephone to illustrate the idea of prayer. He said, "Now kids, you know how you talk to people on the telephone and you don't see them on the end of the other line, but you know they are there?" The children nodded their heads, "yes". He said, "Well, talking to God is like talking on the telephone. He's on the other end of the line, even though you can't see Him, but He's listening." About that time a little boy spoke up and said, "What's His number?"

Well, that's a good question. Do you know how to get in touch with God? Or maybe, you feel like the cartoon character, Ziggy. The cartoon showed him standing on a mountain and he was staring up into the sky. The sky was dark and there was only one lonely cloud in the sky. Frame after frame showed Ziggy staring up into the sky. Then in the last frame he yells, "Have I been put on hold for the rest of my life?"

-Obviously, the reason why people pray is because they think prayer is effective. But that raises a question: "Just how effective is praying?"

Of all the privileges the saints of God enjoy, perhaps the greatest is the privilege of prayer. To be able to go directly into the presence of the Lord is an honor beyond description.

-Heb. 4:16

Heb 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

To be able to speak to the God who created and controls the universe, and to know that He has promised to hear us and to answer us in a blessing too great to comprehend. When you consider the fact that real prayer is not just our sending words out into the thin air, what a privilege is ours, to be able to speak to God, knowing He will hear and He will answer;

Knowing that He has invited us to be involved with Him in the work He is doing.

Jer. 33:3

Jer 33:3 Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.

Isa. 65:24

Isa 65:24 And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.

But, like anything else in life, we humans can even mess up something as profound and as beautiful as prayer.

-Many have prayed properly and have seen God move in tremendous power as He heard and answered those prayers. Others have prayed out of wrong motives and have received nothing in answer to their request.

Nobody who has ever lived knew more about praying than the Lord Jesus Christ. He tells us in this passage how we can make sure we connect with God every time we pray.

-Jesus is going to teach us to pray, but before He teaches us to pray, we need to first get ready to pray. Listen to our Lord's :

I. Rebuke – Mt 6:5, 7-8

In these verses, Jesus is exposing some problems in prayer that were rampant in His day. He says:

A. Don't Be As the Hypocrites –Mt 6:5

Jesus condemns the pretentious praying of the hypocrites who are insincere and behave in such a way that was meant to deceive other people.

-Don't miss what Jesus is saying. He does not say that they love to pray nor that they loved God. No, they loved themselves and the opportunity to show off their spirituality which public praying gave them.

-There is nothing wrong with standing to pray, nor with public praying, but Jesus uncovered their real motive - to be seen of men; not to be heard by God.

-Folks do that today. Some in church pray, not to lay hold of the throne of God, but to impress folks and to gain for themselves a reputation for piety.

-I heard about a young lawyer who had opened a new office. He was seated behind his shiny new desk, eagerly awaiting his first client. Soon he heard footsteps in the hall and then a hand on the doorknob. Wanting to look important, he pretended to be busy. As the man at the door walked in, he picked up the telephone and carried on a fake conversation. He said, "I do appreciate your calling, call back in a few days and if I can take your case, I will." He put the receiver back on the hook and spoke to what he hoped was his first client and said, "Now, what may I do for you?" The man said, "I'm from the phone company and I've come to connect your telephone."

-Jesus said that there is a lot of public praying that is just like that. It's praying to be seen by others, but nobody is on the other end of the line.

-Jesus said, "They have their reward in full."

B. Don't Be As the Heathen – Mt 6:7-8

Do heathens pray? They sure do. But it is "vain repetitions." They think they will be heard for their much speaking.

-Here Jesus is talking about rote praying or memorized praying; just using the same old worn-out cliches and phrases, saying the things you have heard other people say, without really putting any heart into your prayer. They just say the same prayer over and over and over. The Lord Jesus says that is not the kind of prayer that gets God's attention.

-A little girl went to her grandmother's house to spend the night. The next morning, they were talking at the breakfast table, and the grandmother asked her little grandchild if she had said her prayers the night

before, before she went to sleep. The little girl said, "No, Granny, I didn't." She said, "Why not?" She said, "I got down on my knees to pray, but I got to thinking that God's probably tired of hearing the same old prayer every night. So I just crawled into bed and told Him about Little Red Riding Hood." Now quite frankly, the way some people pray, they may as well be talking to God about Little Red Riding Hood, because all they do is say the same thing over and over and over.

Jesus does not meant that we should not repeat the same words in prayer. The emphasis is on the word "vain". Jesus repeated Himself in prayer. In Gethsemane, Jesus went away and prayed the third time, using the same words.

-But it is easy to fall into the trap of using vain repetitions. You could pretty much sum up most praying in a Baptist Church like this: "Father, thank you for your blessings. Please continue to bless us, and if you'll continue to bless us, we'll continue to thank you for your blessings. Amen."

-That's why Jesus goes on to say, "Therefore do not be like them."

II. Requirement – Mt 6:6

Jesus tells us the IMPROPER way to pray; then He tells us the PROPER way to pray: not as the Hypocrites or the Heathen, but Holy Praying.

The Lord takes it for granted that His people will pray. In verse 5 He said, "When you pray"; not "if you pray." Again He says in verse 6, "When you pray;" not if you pray." He says again in verse 7, "When you pray"; not "if you pray". The issue with the Lord Jesus is not whether we will pray, but WHERE we will pray, WHAT we will pray, and How we are to pray.

A. Where We Pray: In Secrecy

"Enter into your closet (your room), and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place." Jesus was not condemning public. The Bible is full of public prayer. Jesus prayed publicly even when He was dying on the cross. The Holy Spirit was sent at Pentecost during a public prayer meeting. Prayer ought to be a part of every corporate worship service. Jesus was not condemning public prayers; He was condemning the desire to be seen praying publicly.

-Real prayer, attention-getting prayer, God – honoring prayer, Spirit – answered prayer is prayed in secret. There you can close the door to all disturbance and distraction and you can also shut out the prying eyes and ears of men and shut yourself in to God. When you're in the secret place, it's just you and God, and that's the way God wants it to be.

The next time you pray, ask yourself some questions: Do I pray more fervently when I'm alone with God, than when I'm in public? Am I thinking of what others are thinking about when I am praying? Am I looking for just the right phrase when I pray in public. Am I praying to God, or am I performing for others.

B. What You Pray: Pray Sincerely

"Pray to your Father" Behind all true prayer is coming into God's presence and seeking His face.

Ps. 27:7-8

Psa 27:7 Hear, O LORD, *when* I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me.

Psa 27:8 *When thou saidst*, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.

-In that secret place we bow down before Him in humble worship, love, and trusting faith. We seek Him in order to acknowledge Him as the Person He is: God the creator and controller, our Lord, the Judge, our Heavenly Father.

-We ought to put our heart as well as our minds into our prayers; thinking of different ways to express our worship and praise for Him; as well as seeking different ways to express our love and dependence on Him.

Notice 6:8

Mat 6:8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

"Well, if God already knows what I need before I pray, then why pray?" Two reasons: First, because God tells us to pray. That's all we need to know. That's enough. Second, James 4:2 says, "You do not have because you do not ask." We can receive by prayer that which we will not have if we do not pray. Our asking shows our obedience and our dependence upon God.

C. How We Are To Pray: Pray Systematically

Real prayer ought to do **four** things:

1.Start with Praise – 6:9-10

Real Prayer is to YOUR Father. You cannot pray to a God you do not know and as a son knows his Father. Prayer is to be the simple act of a child talking to his father.

Focus on the Father. Make sure you hallow God's name. Lift up God's name, magnify God's name, exalt God's name, bless God's name.

-Seek His will for your life.

2.Share your Petitions – 6:11

Share your NEEDS; not wants, with Him. He will supply all your needs.

3.Seek God's Pardon – 6:12

We need God's forgiveness. God is not only our Heavenly Father, he is also a Holy Father, and if we have a rebellious spirit or a stubborn heart that refuses to let go of sin in our life, our prayers will be ineffective. Every prayer should contain confession and cleansing.

Not only are we to GET forgiveness; we are to GIVE forgiveness. There can be no worship heavenward unless there is forgiveness. We cannot be right with God if we are not right with our brother and sister.

4.Secure God's Power – 6:13

We are in a war with the devil. The devil does everything he can to discourage you, defile you, defeat you, and devour you. Our only protection in this spiritual war is prayer.

Pray! Pray! Pray! Prayer not only changes things; prayer changes you and me!

Focus On the Father Matthew 6:9-13

Our Lord Jesus was a man of prayer. Walk through the Gospels and you will see how important prayer was to Him.

-Did you realize that the gospels record only fifty-two days of our Lord's life. We know that He had a three year public ministry, and somehow we assume that the Gospels record what happened in those three years, but not so. If the Gospels record only fifty-two days of our Lord's ministry, no wonder John says, "there are so many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." But one of the things that Jesus talked about and practiced personally, was prayer. He prayed with his Disciples; He prayed early in the morning; He prayed all night; He prayed with individuals; He prayed with the multitudes; He prayed privately and He prayed publicly, even from the cross. He taught on prayer and He gave parables about prayer.

-If Jesus, the sinless Son of God, needed to pray, how much more do we, who are so sinful and weak, need to pray.

Not only did Jesus pray, but from the beginning of the Bible to its conclusion, we see absolute evidence that God answers prayer.

- Prayer opened the Red Sea..
- Prayer brought water from the rock and bread from heaven.
- Prayer made the sun stand still.
- Prayer brought fire from the sky on Elijah's sacrifice.
- Prayer overthrew armies and healed the sick.
- Prayer raised the dead.

-Because we pray, God works through us in ways that He wouldn't otherwise. God has made certain things dependent upon prayer; things that will never be done unless we pray. When we do not pray, we limit what God might do in our lives.

-James 4:2 says, "You do not have, because you do not ask." If we want all the blessings God has to give us, we must pray.

Our Lord's best known prayer is the most famous prayer in all the world. No other prayer is known by so many people or said in so many places in so many different languages than the prayer called by many, "The Lord's Prayer." Actually, it is not "The Lord's Prayer." It's "The Disciple's Prayer" or "The Model Prayer." In this prayer Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "and forgive us our debts." Of course, Jesus had no "debts" or "sin", so it was not a prayer that He would pray. John 17 is the real Lord's Prayer.

Prayer is the most important thing we do in our Christian life, because prayer can do anything God can do! And what can God do? Anything!

Will you join me in asking the Lord to teach us to pray?

Don't miss how Jesus introduces this model prayer.

-Notice that Jesus does not say, "Pray AFTER THIS MANNER." We are not just to recite a prayer; we are to PRAY a prayer.

-There are times when quoting this prayer is very appropriate, but we should not merely recite the words; we should pray from our hearts. God wants our prayers to come from our hearts, not just from our mouths.

This "Disciple's Prayer" or "Pattern Prayer" or "Model Prayer" contains only 66 words. It is okay to recite it or memorize it, but it is not so much a prayer in itself as it is a skeleton which believers are to flesh out with their own words of praise, their own words of adoration, and their own petitions. This prayer is not a substitute for our prayers, but a guide for them.

Prayers should always begin and end with praise. This model prayer has nine petitions or request:

- The first three refer to God's NAME, KINGDOM, AND WILL (6:9-10). This means powerful prayers begin by focusing on God.
- The second three request are for DAILY BREAD (Provisions), FORGIVENESS, and PROTECTION (6:11-13a).
- The prayer ends by focusing on God's KINGDOM, POWER, and GLORY (6:13b).

I. Our Revelation OF the Father

If you were asked to describe God in two words or less, what would you say?

-Jesus answers that question like this: "Our Father." God is not just an impersonal creator. God is our loving, heavenly Father. When Jesus teaches us to pray, "Our Father," He reveals we can be secure in God's presence.

Our Relationship TO The Father

Three things we must understand when we address God as "our Father:"

A. We have a Family Relationship with Him

God is "our Father," which means He is a Person with whom we can have a relationship. We can't have a relationship with a creative force, or an impersonal power; however, we can have a relationship with a person.

-But what kind of relationship? Jesus tells us when He uses the word "Father". If God is "our Father", then who are we? His children! We are to approach God and speak to Him as "Our Father". It is very important we understand prayer is the privilege of family members only.

The folks of the O.T. had a much different concept of their relationship with God than we have today. The men and women who worshiped God in O.T. days had a great sense of fear and reverence for Him (It would do us good to have some of that in our day). The downside of their experience was a lack of personal intimacy with God.

-They had to approach God through the Tabernacle, the Temple, and animal sacrifice. In the entire O.T., the word "father" is used to describe God only fourteen times, and in every instance it refers to God as the father of the Israelite nation.

-What a tremendous difference there is when you cross over into the N.T. You can't get past Matthew before you're introduced to a whole new understanding of the Fatherhood of God. It is no longer national; it is now individual and personal. The word "Father" occurs seventeen times in the Sermon on the Mount. In the four Gospels, Jesus refers to the Father more than seventy times.

-In the O.T., we were servants; in the N.T., we are sons and daughters. How did that come about? Jesus!

– Gal. 4:4-7

Gal 4:4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

Gal 4:5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Gal 4:6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

Gal 4:7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

We are adopted as sons! How are we adopted into the family of God? **Gal. 3:26-29**

Gal 3:26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Gal 3:27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Gal 3:29 And if ye *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

-Once we are adopted into God's family, nothing can break that adoption. We will always be in the family of God. **Roman 8:31-39**

Rom 8:31 What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us?

Rom 8:32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

Rom 8:33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? *It is* God that justifieth.

Rom 8:34 Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

Rom 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Rom 8:36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

Rom 8:37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

Rom 8:38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

Rom 8:39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Sons and daughters have family rights. For example, we are guaranteed access to our father – **Eph 2:18**

Eph 2:18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

-I would point out that this is a family prayer. Jesus teaches us to pray "Our Father"; not my Father. Those who have trusted Christ are all in one family – God's family. We all have the same rights and privileges.

Some folks struggle with God being our Father. It is an awesome responsibility to be a father, because fathers are to model to some degree what our Heavenly Father is like.

-Some say that if God is like my father, I don't want Him. Some ungodly fathers are abusive and rough and unkind and uncaring. There are many absentee fathers. Many who do not provide for their children nor protect them.

One dad wrote this:

My little boy came to me one day

And placed his tiny hand in mine.

And said, "Daddy, what is God like?"

I said, "God is love and merciful, kind and wise,

And all the good things that you know."

And he smiled into my eyes, and said,

"Then daddy, God must be just like you."

I remembered that Jesus said that God is like a Father,

And I had to bow my head in shame,

Because I, as a father, was so unlike God.

Even though you may not have had a caring, compassionate, loving earthly father, you wanted one. We all do! Well, as Christians, we have a perfect One in heaven, and He wants us to talk to Him and have a relationship with Him as our caring and loving Father.

B. We are to Talk Intimately to Him

Let me remind you again that even the greatest O.T. Saints would call God, "Lord God" or "Almighty God"; never Father.

-When Jesus prayed to His Father in Gethsemane, He called Him. "Abba, Father" (Mark 14:36).

Mark 14:36 And he said, Abba, Father, all things *are* possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.

It is the only recorded time that Jesus used that term on earth for His Father.

-The term "Abba" is best translated "Daddy" or "Pappa" The word "Abba" comes from the lips of a child, conveying affection. It indicates an intimate, close relationship that makes our awesome God approachable and enables us to be secure with Him.

Paul is the only other Bible writer to use the term "Abba" as it relates to the Father. He uses it twice (Romans 8:15; Gal. 4:6) and tells us that the indwelling Holy Spirit puts within us a spirit-produced awareness of the rich reality that God has made us His children, and, therefore, we can come before Him without fear or hesitation as our beloved Father. It includes the confidence that we are truly Sons of God.

-Although I am personally uncomfortable calling God "Daddy" I think "Dearest Father" or "Dear Father" is certainly biblical and just as intimate.

C. As Christians we have a responsibility to be faithful and true to our Father and to our brothers and sisters in God's family.

Roman 8:17

I Peter 1:3-5

Rom 8:17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer *with*him, that we may be also glorified together.

1Pe 1:3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1Pe 1:4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven

for you,

1Pe 1:5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Honoring Our Heavenly Father Matthew 6:9-13

If our prayers are to be powerful, God -attention – getting prayers, we must pray aright. We must follow God's pattern.

We are to pray TO our Heavenly Father. We are to address and to direct our prayers TO the Father. We are not to direct our prayers to Jesus, not to the Holy Spirit, and certainly, not to Mary.-Note this: We are to pray TO the Father through the Son, and By the Holy Spirit.

In this model Prayer, Jesus teaches that prayer doesn't begin with us and our desires, but with God and His desires. Prayer doesn't begin with our concerns, but with God's concerns.

I. Our Father's Reputation

What kind of Father is our God?

A. He is a Loving Father – 1 John 3:1

1Jn 3:1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

God loves us with the same love with which He loves His only Son, Jesus. In Christ, we are the objects of God's love and affection.

-John 17:26

Joh 17:6 I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.

B. He is a correcting Father – Heb. 12:5-6

Heb 12:5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

Heb 12:6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

No one likes to be disciplined, but discipline proves that God loves us and that we belong to Him.

-God disciplines us because He cares what kind of people we are becoming.

C. He is a caring Father

God cares about everything in our lives. That's why He wants us to pray and tell Him all about our troubles. He cares! I Peter 5:7

1Pe 5:7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

-God cares about our discouragement, our loneliness, our problems, our financial stress, our health, our pressure at work and school, and on and on.

-God cares about our fears, frustrations, and failings. He cares about how you feel right now.

-In Matt 10:30 Jesus said, "the very hair of your head are all numbered." Jesus didn't say God knows

how many hairs are on your head, which changes daily (though I think He does) He said the hairs on your head "are all numbered." That means He knows where hair #1,365 is on my head, and where hair #3 is. Why would God want to know things like that about you and me? Because He cares about every aspect of our lives. He knows about every cell in your body, and He knows your every hurt and pain because He cares about you.

D. He is a comforting Fatherhood

When we are fearful, frustrated or hurting, we need someone who not only cares, but who also can comfort us. Our Heavenly Father can comfort as no one else can because He is "the God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3).

2Co 1:3 Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

How does God comfort us?

1.He comforts us with His Promises

There are more than 7,000 promises in the Bible, and God has never broken one of them. There is a perfectly matched promise for every problem we will ever have.

2.He comforts us with His Presence Deut. 31:8

Deu 31:8 And the LORD, he *it is* that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.

3.He comforts us with His People

God's people fellowship with us, but they are also available to us so that we can share our hearts and hurts with.

-God doesn't comfort us just to make us feel better or to help us through our problems. Our Heavenly Father wants us to be good stewards of our pain as He comforts us in our painful experiences so we can comfort others who will go through similar experiences – 2 Cor 1:4

2Co 1:4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

II. Our Father's Residence

Heaven is where God resides. Notice that our Father is in Heaven and we are on earth. Heaven refers to the seat of all authority,

power, dominion, and greatness. We are on earth, which means, we pray from a position of weakness. "In heaven" means that we don't have a problem that He can't handle.

God is everywhere. Listen to what Solomon says in his prayer as he dedicates the Temple to God:

1 Kings 8:27

1Ki 8:27 But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?

-Our Heavenly Father is everywhere including IN US – PS. 139:7-12

Psa 139:7 Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

Psa 139:8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou *art* there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou *art there*.

Psa 139:9 *If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;*

Psa 139:10 Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

Psa 139:11 If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.

Psa 139:12 Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light *are* both alike *to thee*.

Not only is our Heavenly Father everywhere, He can also do anything. His power is unlimited. How many places can you be in at one time? Only one! Have you ever needed to be in several places at once, but couldn't? Why? Because you don't have the power to be in more than one place at a time. But God has the power to be everywhere at one time and can do anything.

Because God is in Heaven, He is worthy of all praise. God sits on His throne in Heaven, but what is His throne in Heaven like? Revelation 4 describes God's throne as a throne of Majesty where He has absolute authority and power. There is a vast host around the throne, praising Him as He rules in glory.

III. Our Father's Respect

The word "hallowed" means "holy" or "sacred". To hallow something is to treat it as sacred and holy and worthy of the highest respect.

Why did He say, "Hallowed be your NAME?"

-Your name is important to you. It may not matter to anyone else in the world, but you care about your name because it identifies who you are.

What pops into your mind when you hear the word "God"?

It may be His Great Might. He is the Almighty! God created the world out of nothing. He parted the Red Sea for the children of Israel. He caused the walls of Jericho to come tumbling down. He shut the mouths of lions so Daniel could get a good night's sleep.

We know God through the things He's done. God's name is His character and His reputation.

-"For whosoever shall call upon the NAME of the Lord shall be saved."

-Joel 2:32 And it shall come to pass, *that* whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.

-Act 2:21 And it shall come to pass, *that* whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

-Rom 10:13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

"Lord, help us to take you and your name seriously and treat your name with respect as it ought to be treated. May we give honor and glory and majesty to your name!" He is so worthy!

We are to never take His name in vain – lightly or flippantly, which is the exact opposite of "hallowing" God's name.

One thing is certain: God's name is not being hallowed today.

-As the world gets more churchy, the church gets more worldly.

-If Christians took the name of God more seriously, the people who don't care about God would take us more seriously.

"O God, help me to live in such a way that your name is made great in my life."

Before you pray about what you want, pray first about what God wants.

God's name Matters to God. It ought to matter to us!

Watching For Kingdom Advancements

Matthew 6:10

In Matthew 6:9, Jesus said, "After this manner or this model or this pattern, we are to pray."

-Sometimes we think prayer is all about us and our needs, but Jesus says, "No, prayer is all about God." There are nine petitions in this prayer. The first three petitions deal with God's name, God's kingdom, and God's will. The next three petitions deal with our daily needs, the forgiveness of our sins, and delivering us from evil. The last three petitions focus again upon God: His Kingdom, His power, and His glory.

We have already seen that we are to honor and reverence God's name, and now we are told to pray concerning God's Kingdom.

-Did you notice that God's Kingdom is mentioned twice in this prayer (Mt 6:10, 13)?

A Kingdom requires a King or Monarch. The most important thing to be said about the Kingdom of God is that it is God's Kingdom. He has the right and authority to rule over His Kingdom. His control and the domination of His will is over the earth. The Kingdom of God really means the reign of God.

I. The Announcement of the Kingdom

There are two Kingdoms in this world. There has been ever since man sinned against God. There is a Kingdom of light and a Kingdom of darkness. God has a Kingdom, but Satan, also, has a kingdom. Each kingdom has its king, its ruler, and each kingdom has its people or citizens, and each kingdom has its destiny.

The Kingdom of God is ruled by Almighty God. His people are His saints and are His loyal subjects who desire to do God's will for God's glory. They will one day dwell with Him.

The Kingdom of Satan is ruled by Satan, the prince and power of the air who is the god of this age. His subjects are those who live in rebellion toward God. Their destiny is to be judged by God and to be separated from Him throughout eternity in a literal hell because they have rejected Him as the Savior from their sins.

This Kingdom idea runs all through the Bible and is announced over and over again: Isa. 9:6-7; Dan. 7:27; Luke 1:33; Matt. 3:1-2; 4:17, 23; Luke 4:43; 17:21

The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan are kingdoms in conflict. Satan wants to deceive, defile, corrupt, and destroy God's Kingdom. Satan brings death because he rebels against God. The two kingdoms always oppose each other. They are always in conflict.

II. The Advancement of the Kingdom

We are by nature the children of wrath. That means that you and I were born in sin, under Satan's control, and in his kingdom.

How do you and I move from the Kingdom of Satan to the Kingdom of God?

-“Your Kingdom come” is serious business. When we pray, “Your Kingdom come”, we are inviting God to invade our world and transform it.

-“Your Kingdom come” is the shortest petition in this prayer – only three words. But it is given in the imperative mood and is given in the form of a command. More than that, the verb is placed first for emphasis, so it might well be translated, “Come, Kingdom of God.” The same could be said about the following petition, “Be done, will of God.”

-There is a note of urgency about those words, as if we are praying, “Lord, let your kingdom come right now, right now, today!”

The first message John the Baptist preached was, “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:1-2). Then, the very first message Jesus preached was, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matt. 4:7)

The kingdom of heaven deals with the right or authority of Christ to rule over His Kingdom.

-Christ will rule on earth ONE DAY, and we look forward to His reign, His control, the domination of His will over all the earth, but praying for God's Kingdom to come involves several important aspects and applications for our lives right now.

Let me put it another way: What is the Kingdom of God? In one sense it is a present reality; in another sense it is yet to come.

-The Kingdom of God is serious business. On one level we are asking God to send Jesus back and bring down the curtain on human history as we have known it. On another level we are inviting God to invade our world and transform it.

-In calm, steady faith we are saying, "Lord, I know your kingdom is coming SOMEDAY, and I pray that you will help me to be patient until that day finally comes, because I really want you to come back right now."

-It's like John as he writes the Book of Revelation. In Rev. one and four, John sees the glory of the resurrected Lord Jesus and John says, "What a wonderful sight. Lord, just bring human history to an end and let's enjoy ourselves with you for eternity." Then the Lord shows John the Tribulation period in Rev. 6-19, and John says, "What a horrible thing. Have mercy on those folks. Give them time and grace to turn to you." Then in Rev. 20, John sees the terrible scene of the Great White Throne Judgment and people being cast into hell – fire because they rejected Jesus as Savior. Then in Rev. 21-22, John catches a glimpse of Heaven. John see pain and separation for the lost, but glory for the saved. He doesn't want the lost to be without Christ, but he wants to experience glory. So finally he says, " Even, so, come quickly, Lord Jesus."

Jesus talked to His disciples about the Kingdom of God almost every day. Why is the Kingdom of God so important that we should make it the subject of our daily prayers?

1. Because the Kingdom of God was the central issue of Jesus' ministry. The Kingdom of God is what He came to establish.

-Jesus came to establish a new society on earth. This society would be made up of men and women who are fully dedicated to doing the will of God.

-When He was here, the Kingdom of God was "at hand" because the King Himself was "in the Midst" of the people. But the Kingdom He would establish would be fundamentally different from the kingdoms of this world because it would call for a moral commitment from those who follow Him. That's a crucial point that forever separates the Kingdom of God from every earthly kingdom.

-The Kingdom of God is reserved for those who recognize and follow the truth as it is revealed in Jesus Christ. That's the moral commitment that Jesus demands of His Followers. Jesus says, "You want to be in my Kingdom? Fine. But you have to become a follower of the truth. You can't remain neutral about me or about the things I'm saying. You have to get off the fence and make a commitment, or you'll never be in the Kingdom of God."

-Being in the Kingdom of God means we have made a moral commitment to the truth, and that commitment guides everything we do. We start from a different place, we look at life a different way, we make decisions on a different basis, and therefore, we end up in a different place.

-Being in the Kingdom of God demands conversion and commitment. It comes first in the hearts of men and women as they surrender to Jesus Christ. John 3:3,5; Luke 18:16-17; 17:20-21

-God has called us to live as if the king were already in residence on this earth, because He does reside in our hearts.

2. The Kingdom of God is important because it is the only thing that will last forever.

Gabriel told Mary that she would give birth to a Son and of His Kingdom there would be no end.

Luke 1:33

-The Kingdom will be made up of men and women who have decided to live by God's eternal values.

Living by Kingdom values produces Kingdom rewards.

3. The Kingdom of God gives purpose meaning, and a goal to history.

The final stage and the final fulfillment of the Kingdom of God will begin when Jesus returns and destroys the armies of the Anti-Christ and bind Satan for 1,000 years and we will experience the Millennial Kingdom.

-It will be the coming golden age for the earth; paradise on the earth. Isa. 11 says that at that time, the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the young child can play on the hole of the serpent, men will beat their swords into plowshares, for nation will not rise up against nation any more and they shall never learn war any more. The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

III. The Anticipation of the Kingdom

The Kingdom of God is the only possible way to explain why some people live the way they do.

-Matt.6:33 describes the life of one who has been gripped with the concept of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus predicted that some folks would live the Kingdom life – Luke 18:28-30.

People will do things because of the Kingdom of God that they would not do otherwise. In some cases they will choose to set aside a life of ease and comfort; in other cases they will set aside the closest human relationships; in still other cases, they will give up a promising career; still others will spend their money in ways that make no earthly sense.

-Listen to our Lord's challenge: Luke 14:26-27. Jesus was calling His disciples to cultivate such a devotion to him that their attachment to everything else – including their own lives – would seem like hatred by comparison.

We become a kingdom man or a kingdom woman when we decide to live by the values that matter to God – righteousness, holiness, humility, compassion, zeal, sacrifice, love, joy, and forgiveness.

Remember that it all starts by being born again. John 3:3,5

“Thy Kingdom Come” “Even so, come Lord Jesus!”

Desiring God's Will In Our Life Matthew 6:10

Jesus focuses on two things in Matthew 6:10 as He teaches His disciples to pray: The Kingdom of God and the Will of God.

1. Jesus literally says, “Come, Kingdom of God.”

There is a note of urgency about those words, as if we are praying, “Lord, let your kingdom come now; right now, today!”

-Every person is either in the Kingdom of Satan or the Kingdom of God. We are all born sinners and are in Satan's Kingdom. There is only one way to move FROM the Kingdom of Satan, and INTO the Kingdom of God. In John 3:3,5 Jesus says that unless you are born again, you cannot understand nor enter into the Kingdom of God. When you are born again, God forgives you of your sins and His Holy Spirit comes into your heart. That's why Jesus said in Luke 17:21 that “the Kingdom of God is within you.”

-The Kingdom of God is both now, when a person is saved, and future, when the Lord Jesus will one day set up His Kingdom on earth.

2. The second half of Matthew 6:10 literally says, “Be done, will of God.”

Jesus commands us to do the will of God while we are on earth. In Heaven, God's will is always done; on earth we have a decision to make. We can choose to do the will of God, or we can choose to reject doing the will of God. This is a prayer for God's will to be done now.

Three things I want to share with you as Jesus tells us to desire God's will in our lives.

I. The Assessment of the Will of God

A. Some **Misconceptions** concerning God's will

1. Some folks are *Afraid* to pray, “Thy will be done.”

They are afraid if they pray that “God's will be done” in their lives, that God will make them do something that they do not want to do. They are afraid that God's will would mean Africa or India or some missionary service somewhere that will require total poverty and the end of all relationships they have known. They're afraid that as soon as they say, “God, you can do whatever you want with me,” He's going to pack them off to the worst place in the world, some pit where they never wanted to go in the first place.

-Wait a minute! Is our God that kind of Father? Do you think God is up in heaven, just waiting for us to say “yes” to Him so He can do the worst thing in the world to us? I don't think so. That's one of the enemy's lies. He wants us to believe that if we ask for God's will in our lives, we're signing up for a journey of no return.

-Rom. 12:1-2 Someone has well said that the will of God is something we would choose for ourselves every time; if we were smart

enough to choose it.

2. Some think of the will of God as something *Distasteful*.

They remember our Lord praying in Gethsemane, "not my will, but thine be done", and as Jesus submits to the Father's will, we see Christ walking up Calvary's hill.

-or, they remember Job, who lost his wealth and children and suffered in his body, and they associated all the things Job experienced with the will of God. After all, didn't Job say, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord." So, when our hearts are broken, we say, "It is the will of God." So they think of God's will as something distasteful.

-Let me remind you that the sunrise is also God's will. Rain is the will of God. The seasons of the year are in God's will. The time of harvest which provides us with food and clothing is in the will of God. The fact of the matter is, the good things of life far outweigh the bad. There are more sunrises than cyclones; more day when we are full than when we are hungry; more well days than sick days.

3. Everything that happens *is not* the will of God.

When Janice was killed, some well-meaning folks said, "Well, I don't understand why the Lord would take someone like Janice and allow some ungodly folks to continue to live in their sin, but we can't question the will of God. He has a purpose in this."

-Listen, everything that happens is not the will of God. The rising tide of divorce is not the will of God. Greed and corruption are not the will of God.

4. Let me add one more thing: All of the difficulties you and I face are not because we are out of the will of God. Sometimes difficulties come because we *are IN* the will of God.

Jesus was never more in the will of His Father than when He died on the cross.

B. The **Meaning** of the will of God

Doing God's will means doing what pleases God. It means yielding to the desires, the directions, and the plans of God for your life.

At first there was only one will in this universe; that was God's will, and His will was perfect. Then a second will was introduced. Satan's will (Isa. 14:12-14). Then Adam and Eve interjected their will. Now, there are six billion people on earth who want their will to be done. There is still only one perfect will and that's God's will.

-God's will is rarely done on the earth. Just look around you. Do you see God's will being done? Pick up the newspaper and read about the school shootings, the political corruption, the conflicts and wars all over the world.

-Someone else's will is being done. In some ways, "Thy will be done" seems like the most hopeless of all prayer requests. Rarely do we mean it for our own lives. Rarely does it seem to be answered. But the hardest part is this: God is a perfect Gentleman. He will not force Himself upon us. If we do not wish to do His will, He will respect our decision.

C. The **Manner** in which God's will is to be done

Exactly how is God's will being done in Heaven? His will is being done Always, not just sometimes; Completely, not partially; Perfectly, not imperfectly; Enthusiastically, not half-heartedly; joyfully, with no complaining.

II. The Adventure of Doing God's Will

A. **Praying** "your will be done" means giving up control of your own will.

God has a will or desire for your life. But you also have a will or desire for your life. When you pray, "Your will be done," you are asking that God's will take precedence over your will.

-When we ask that God's will be done, we are implicitly asking that our will be overturned, if necessary.

-Only one will can be done at a time. Either God calls the shots, or you call the shots. Either He is in control, or you are in control.

So does it mean that if we find God's will and do it, everything will always come up roses? Hardly. His will may involve some difficult and trying times. But regardless of how hot the oven might get, the center of God's will is always the safest place for any of us to be.

B. **Praying** "Your will be done" means trusting God to do whatever He thinks is best.

God is All-knowing and All-wise and loves us more than we can understand. He wants the best for us and understands what is best

for us, even if we don't understand how in the world it could ever even be good for us, much less, best for us, we can trust Him to know what is best for us. God loves you! He's your Father! You are His child! He wants what's best for you!

C. Praying "Your will be done" means praying against the status quo.

God does not accept the status quo. Think about that carefully. Too many things that are going on are obviously not God's will. God does not accept Satan's usurpation of God's rightful place in the world. He does not accept that sin and wrong should reign forever on the earth. God does not sit idly by while the world goes to hell. That's why He raised up mighty men like Moses, Joshua, David, and Paul. That's why He wrote the Ten Commandments in stone with His own finger. That's why He inspired the Bible writers to write down His truth. And that's why He sent His own son to come to this world and to die to forgive us of our sins.

-If things were OK, why did God send His Son? Things were not OK. They were dreadfully wrong, and getting worse all the time. So God intervened in human history through His Son, Jesus.

-Praying for God's will to be done on earth goes against the grain. They are fighting words for a world that hates God. These words rebel against everything that is evil and wrong on this earth.

Praying "Your will be done" leads to action on our part. We've got to get active and help make it happen.

We need to pray something like this: "Lord Jesus, may your will be done in my life. Nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Amen."

III. The Anticipation of God's Will Being Done

One of the things that makes heaven, heaven, is that God's will is always done by those who dwell there.

-How would your life change if doing God's will became your first priority? Before you and I can honestly pray "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we must honestly believe that His will for our life is the best and happiest way for us to live.

-If we don't FIND and FOLLOW God's will for our life, we are the loser.

Dr. Jim Futral was coming home from his morning run. As he started to turn into his driveway, he noticed a bird's egg had fallen from its nest that was on a limb that stretched part of the way across the drive way. As he looked closer, he noticed that a baby bird had begun to form inside the egg, but now that little form was lying on the grounds beside the broken shell. He thought as he looked at that little form, "There is not one thing I can do to correct this. But what lost potential! The potential to sing, to fly, to reproduce, is gone forever."

How many folks who have never discovered and followed God's perfect will for their life, will miss so much in life, because they followed their own will, rather than God's will?

Are you willing to pray: "Lord Jesus, may your will be done in my life – nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Amen."

Daily Bread Living Matthew 6:11

The first half of this model prayer magnifies and honors God. It speaks of God's name, God's Kingdom, and God's will being done.

Now, our Lord tells us that it is time for us to ASK from God and to ASK for yourselves.

-I say that because some folks believe that it is wrong for us to ask for ourselves, because that would be selfish, and, yet, God encourages us to ask!

Some think the Spiritual and God honoring part of this prayer is the first half that mentions God's name and kingdom, and will, but the second half of the prayer is just as spiritual and just as God honoring.

-God is the Great Provider. Every good and perfect gift comes from him. He is the source of all we have, and not only us, He is creator of ALL and He provides for all of His creation. God sustains His work throughout the earth – see Psalm 104:10-21, 27-29 NLT

Some say, "But doesn't that imply that God is doing a pretty lousy job in His world? How do you explain the famines that take thousands of lives every year? How do you explain the staring eyes and bloated bellies that newscast regularly bring into our homes? If God is responsible for feeding the birds of the air and the beasts of the field and the men and women of the earth, then why do so many die of starvation?"

-It's not my purpose to deal with this problem here, but let me give you the short answer:

1. We live in a fallen world and that means starvation, disease, and death is part of the problem. This earth is a slave to corruption, which means catastrophes like food shortage, war, tornadoes, and earthquakes, and will continue until the day God renews the world and rids it of its sin. Rom. 8:20-22
2. Some people suffer because of their own spiritual blindness and ignorance. For example, many in India are starving, but there are cows for food everywhere. But, being Hindus, they believe cows are sacred and had rather die than to kill one.

No matter what your position in life – Prince or Pauper – we all have needs. Kingdom citizens are not exempt from need. So need is part of life, and prayer is the means God uses to supply needs.

-God is interested in us and wants us to bring our needs to Him. We honor Him by doing so.

Name three things you pray about most often. Jesus taught us to pray for:

1. Provision – our present need – Our daily bread.
2. Pardon – our past – Forgive us of our sins
3. Protection – our future – Lead us not into temptation.

The prayer begins with a petition for provision: "Give us today our daily bread."

This petition is for Bread; not Cake! It is for our NEEDS; not our WANTS!

-When was the last time you actually prayed to God, "O God, please give me a meal?" Most of us ought to pray the opposite. "O God, prevent me from eating another meal. I have already eaten too much."

The truth is, we have so much that we often take for granted the provision of food that comes from our Heavenly Father's hands.

-It is from this request that formed a familiar childhood prayer:

God is great.

God is good.

Let us thank Him for our food.

By His hands we all are fed.

Thank you, Lord, for our daily bread.

I hope you stop long enough before each meal to thank God for His provision of food. I do, but I am often in a hurry and I don't speak from my heart as I should.

-I like the custom of Russian believers: At the beginning of the meal, they all stand, bow their heads, and thank God for the food. Then they sit down and share their meal together. At the end of the meal, they stand again and pray, thanking God for what they had just received.

Thanking God for our daily bread refers to more than just food. It refers to all our basic needs. What are our basic needs? Something to PUT IN, something to PUT ON, something to PUT OVER.

-God wants us to ask daily, not because He loves to hear us beg, but because He knows we have short memories and often forget that He is the one who supplies our every need.

This is to be more than a petition. God wants Daily Bread Living to be our Christian lifestyle. Let me suggest four steps to Daily Bread Living:

I. Gratitude

The very first word in this petition - "Give" - teaches us that everything we have comes from God. Everything.

-Everything we have at this moment, including the very breath we are breathing, comes as a gift of the Father – the clothes we wear,

the food we eat, the friendships we've developed, the education we've gained, the mind we use, the words we speak. Everything comes from God.

-I point this out because many do not realize that it is God that is providing for them. They assume they are providing for themselves. Yet, it is God who gives them energy and health to work. It is God who gives them the ability and know-how to do a certain job. God gave them the mind they have and the personality they have. He cares for us, provides for us, and we receive from Him.

A. God's giving is of His Grace

We do not deserve anything from God, but because of His grace, He blesses us and supplies our needs.

B. God's giving is of His Mercy

God is big with mercies. In the light of our sin and rebellion against Him, we deserve nothing but His wrath. We all stand guilty and accountable before God. But our God is big with mercy.

C. God's giving is of His Ability Phil. 4:19

You do realize, do you not, that, in one moment, all that we have can be gone. With the economy as it is, our savings can vanish like smoke. We could be unemployed tomorrow. Companies can shut down before the week is up. Our housing and transportation could be gone tomorrow.

-No higher form of worship exist than for a child of God to enter into the presence of his Heavenly

Father and unashamedly declare: "I cannot make it without you! I am totally dependent upon you, Lord!"

II. Contentment

Contentment with what God has already provided. Jesus encourages us to pray for our NEEDS; not for our GREEDS.

-Prov. 30:7-9 What a wonderful outlook on life. "Lord, don't make me too rich or too poor. O God, give me whatever you think is enough, and I will be content."

III. Confidence – Psalms 68:19

Daily Bread Living means believing that God will provide what we need on a day-by-day basis. Asking for daily bread teaches us to take life one day at a time. God is teaching us moment-by-moment dependence on Him.

There is no need to pray about yesterday's needs, for yesterday is gone. There is no need to pray about tomorrow's needs, for tomorrow may never come. Rather, pray about today and walk in simple faith with the Lord day-by-day.

-Matt. 6:34

Exodus 16 records the experience of the children of Israel in the wilderness and it provides a powerful illustration of the principle Jesus is teaching here. The children of Israel had just crossed the Red Sea. After that great miracle they began grumbling in the desert. "Why did you bring us out here? At least we got to eat back in Egypt. We are going to starve to death." God told the people to get ready, because He was going to provide food for them – manna and quail. Then God's instructions: "Go out and get as much as you NEED for yourself and your family. But don't get anymore than you need. If you get more than you need, it will rot and maggots will infest your quail. On the day before the Sabbath, you can collect for two days, but that's it. Anyone who tries to hoard extra manna will end up with a worm – infested, rotting mess."

Having to live from hand to mouth one day at a time can be a blessing if it teaches us of our dependence on God. We live in a world that glorifies self – sufficiency and financial independence.

-I believe one reason God does not bless some of us more than He does is because He knows we wouldn't be good stewards of what He gives us.

-The same is true of churches. I use to say that I wished that I could pastor a church that had plenty of money and didn't have to live from week to week just to pay our bills. Then I went to pastor a church that had over a hundred thousand dollars in the bank, and they were not going to touch it. They gave little to missions; did little to meet needs of its people; never gave the staff raises. Like the church of Laodicea, they thought they were "rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing" and knew not that they were "wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

IV. Generosity

Notice the words “us” and “our”. We pray with our brothers and sisters in focus. We pray with generosity toward those who are less fortunate.

-Luke 6:38 - “Give, and it shall be given unto you.”

Gratitude. Contentment. Confidence. Generosity. That's what Daily Bread Living is all about.

Receiving and Practicing Forgiveness Matthew 6:12

The focus of Matthew 6:12 is forgiveness. But what is forgiveness? The Bible uses seven different words that are translated “forgive” or “forgiveness.”

1.To take away or Release

When God forgives us, He takes away our sin. We don't have to carry the burden of sin with us. We are released from the sin and the burden of sin.

-Like the woman who was caught in the act of adultery. The men who brought her to Jesus wanted Him to condemn her, but instead, He took her sins away and released her from her sin. He set her free from her sin. He will do the same for you.

2.To Pardon and Restore

There is no question of guilt or deserving punishment, but God, in His mercy, pardons and restores the person.

3.Cancellation; To Remember no More

How foolish to condemn ourselves after God forgives us and remembers our sin no more. Why should we drag up our sins when God has removed them?

4.To Put away or Remove

This forgiveness refers to hurts or wrongs we experience by another against us. We are to forgive, put the wrong against us away, let it go, refuse to bring the old sin out again and examine it or magnify the offense. Let it go; don't hold on to it.

5.Remission or Blot out or Cleanse

We don't deserve to be forgiven, but God forgives us on the basis of grace and no longer holds us responsible for the sin.

Can you think of anything more wonderful than forgiveness?

Now, let me give you two Biblical concepts of forgiveness.

1.There is the idea of a once-for-all forgiveness.

The basis of once-for-all forgiveness is a personal repentance and faith or trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Rom. 8:1

2.There is the idea of forgiveness in relation to fellowship. It involves being right with God and being right with our fellow man.

This petition is about releasing. Our fellowship with God rests on how well we deal with our sin problem, both vertically and horizontally.

I. This Prayer Involves a Confession

Even after we become Christians, we still sin and, therefore, need daily forgiveness so our fellowship with our heavenly Father may continue.

-This verse deals with sins that block our fellowship with God. This is not a lost man who is afraid of dying outside of Christ and going into outer darkness who is praying this prayer. This is a child of God who calls God, Father. But this child of God has not lived up to his Father's expectation. He is saying “I'm sorry” to his Heavenly Father, so he can have fellowship with Him once again. We let our Father down and we want to make it right with Him.

-You see, we can be IN CHRIST and OUT of Fellowship with him.

When the Lord calls our sin a “debt”, He is reminding us that when we sin, we owe Him something. When you and I sin, it requires

that we use our bodies, our minds, or both. But as Christians, both our body and our mind and our Spirit belong to God (I Cor. 6:19-20). When the Lord redeemed us, He brought us out completely. If you are saved, the Lord owns your life. So, when we use our bodies to commit sin, we are in debt to the Lord because we have used His property for our own purposes.

-When I am made aware of sin in my life, I owe it to my Savior and to myself to confess my guilt before the Lord so the healing and cleansing process can begin in my life.

-Until I come clean before the Lord, I cannot be cleansed by the Lord.

-When I confess my sin before the Lord, I admit that I owe God a debt that I cannot pay on my own.

II. The Prayer Involves a Conditions

Which is more difficult for you: asking God to forgive you or forgiving a person who has sinned against you?

There are ten words in this verse (KJV; eleven in the NIV), but only one of them is important for our purpose. It is the little word "as."

-Jesus says, we set the standard, and then God follows the standard. Unless we forgive others, God will not forgive us.

Why would the Almighty God tie Himself to what we do on earth? Is Jesus saying that our forgiveness by God is conditional on our forgiveness of others? That is exactly what He is saying!

-God extends forgiveness to me to the same degree that I extend forgiveness to others. My Friend, that is a scary thought!

-When I refuse to maintain fellowship with other believers in the family of God, it affects my own fellowship with God the Father.

-The prayer is this: "O God, deal with me as I deal with other people."

To refuse to forgive someone else and then to ask God for His forgiveness is a kind of spiritual hypocrisy.

This fifth petition is the only petition that Jesus offers further commentary on and I believe it is because He knew that we would try to wiggle out of the powerful truth of this petition. See 6:14-15

In case you doubt what I am saying - -See Matt. 18:21-35

-Nothing will suck the joy out of your heart like unforgiveness. What will happen if you live with an unforgiving spirit? Harbor an unforgiving spirit?

Notice Matt. 18:34 "When my children refuse to forgive others, I hand them over to the tormentors

who will torture them day and night until they learn to forgive from the heart."

-What tormentors? The hidden tormentors of anger and bitterness that eat your insides out; the tormentors of frustration and malice that give you ulcers and high blood pressure and migraine headaches; the tormentors that make you lie awake at night stewing over every rotten thing that happens to you. Why? Because you will not forgive from the heart.

How can we even talk about wanting our sins forgiven if we're holding grudges against other people? You're asking God to do for you what you are unwilling to do for others.

You and I are never more like Jesus than when we forgive those who have sinned against us.

Let's take a searching moral inventory and ask ourselves some serious questions:

- Am I holding a grudge against anyone?
- Am I secretly planning revenge against anyone?
- Am I secretly hoping something bad will happen to anyone?
- Do I need to forgive anyone?

Our Heavenly Guidance System Matthew 6:13

We are in that section of the model Prayer that deals with our daily needs.

- We have asked about our Daily Provisions; our daily needs.
- We have asked about our Daily Pardon; those sins that are a part of our lives.
- Now we ask God concerning our Protection. We need God's help with our daily battle with sin and temptation. Sin has been the problem in our Past, but even greater sins may lie before us, in our future. This is a prayer about relying on the Lord to protect us from falling into sin in the future.

Notice that Matt. 6:13 begins with the word, "And." This word ties this request in with our request for bread, for forgiveness, and for grace to forgive others.

Compare Matt. 6:12 with Matt. 6:13:

-Forgive us our sins focuses on PAST sins; Lead us focuses on Future Sins.

-Forgive us our sins focuses on ACTUAL sins; Lead us focuses on POTENTIAL sins that may be committed.

Why do we need to pray, asking God not to do something that he would never do in the first place.

-“Lead us not into temptation.” Does that mean that God might lead us into temptation? How could a holy, righteous, pure God ever lead anyone into temptation?

Notice James 1:13 If God could not tempt anyone to sin, why would Jesus say that we are to pray, “and lead us not into temptation.”

-One pastor prayed: “Lord, lead me not into temptation; I can find temptation all by myself!”

Let me give you my answer. The key all depends on how you define the word “temptation”. The Greek word for “temptation” has two basic meanings. By itself it is a neutral term. It can mean something positive, or it can mean something negative, depending on the context.

-In its positive meaning, it can be, and often is translated by such words as “trial” or “testing”. In those cases it refers to a difficult circumstance in our life, brought about by God in order to improve the quality of our faith and trust in Him.

-In its negative meaning it refers to temptation in the usual English sense of the word – to seduce or lure or solicit to do evil.

So this one Greek word can have two different meanings. It can mean a difficult trial, or it can mean a solicitation to do evil, depending on the context.

-Our answer to the question, “Does God lead His children into temptation?” is going to be radically affected by the meaning we think is dominant.

For example:

James 1:2-4 “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers (various kinds of) temptations.”

The meaning of the word “temptations” here is the same word that is used in Matt 6:13. The meaning is something like this: “Rejoice when you face trials and hardships and difficulties of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance, and perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” James is telling us that God uses trials and difficulties to produce spiritual maturity in our lives.

James 1:12 Again, he is not talking about being enticed to do evil.

James 1:13 God does not solicit His children to do evil. God never sets us up to fail.

To do that would contradict both His holiness and His love.

The key to understanding what Jesus means in 6:13 is the double meaning of the Greek word translated “temptation.”

-What God gives us as a trial or a test is almost always used by Satan as a temptation. The same event may be both a trial and test and also a temptation from Satan.

-Often God allows a trial to come in our life for the positive purpose of maturing us, but Satan tries to co-op it for his own evil reasons to cause us to sin.

For Example:

-The temptations of Jesus in the wilderness. Matt. 4:1 tells us that "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." Who did the leading? The holy Spirit. Who did the tempting?

The devil. Is there a contradiction here? Not at all. Did God know what was going to happen when He sent His son into the wilderness? Yes, He did. He intended from the beginning to demonstrate that His Son would not yield to Satan's temptations. Was God tempting His own Son? No, He wasn't. Did God know that sending His Son into the wilderness would be used by Satan to tempt His Son? Yes, He did.

-We need to think carefully and clearly here. I do not believe that God ever directly tempts His children to sin, because the Bible specifically declares that truth. But it is also true that, from time to time, God allows His children to go into a place where they will face severe temptations from Satan. From God's point of view, it's a test. From Satan's point of view, it's a temptation.

We see this pattern in every area of life. God sends a trial, and Satan turns it into a temptation.

1. Could sickness be a testing from God? Yes, it could. Many good things are accomplished through sickness in the life of the believer.

Does Satan work through sickness? Yes. He does. God may use our sickness to teach us His faithfulness, His power or to teach us to depend upon Him. And through the same sickness Satan will be working to tempt us to despair, to be angry and bitter toward God, and ultimately to turn away from the Lord. What God intends for our spiritual good, Satan uses to pull us down.

-I thought about Mother's sickness. She was a fine Christian lady who wanted to go on to glory to be with her Lord, so why did she have to linger? Was God testing her faith and love for Him? Was Satan tempting her to complain, become bitter toward God, to show that what she had believed and taught for so many years wouldn't be true when it came time for her to die? If so, Satan lost that battle!

2. Suppose you lose your job. You say, "Could that be from God?" Could God have something better in mind for you? He could, and in the midst of it all, He wants to build some spiritual character into your life. And during that trial from God, Satan will tempt you to be angry, to doubt God, and to become discouraged.

3. It works the other way, too. Let's suppose you get a promotion and a nice raise in salary. Now you're better off financially than you've ever been. Can a promotion be a trial from God? Absolutely. It may be a test from God to see how you will handle His blessings. It ought to make us more generous toward God and those in need. But that same prosperity often makes us greedy, selfish, and blind to the less fortunate.

A trial becomes a temptation when we respond wrongly.

Here's what I think Jesus means in this verse: "Lord, please do not lead us into a trial which will present a temptation stronger than our power to resist with your help."

Three things are implied in this verse:

I. God Directs

"And lead us"..."And lead us"..."And lead us"...with wisdom to make the right decisions when faced with trials or temptations.

There are five stages of temptations:

1. Desire: God has given us good desires, such as thirst, rest, and sex. The Evil one tries to get us to satisfy our God-given desires in perverted ways. After Jesus had gone for 40 days without food, Satan tried to get Jesus to produce food for Himself in a perverted way.

2. Deceit: Temptation always comes dressed in sheep's clothing. Satan deceives us by making something sinful look delightful.

3. Delusion: Satan wants us to toy with temptation. When we do, we begin to think a particular sin may be wrong for others, but it's okay for us. Or we play with temptation, thinking I'm too strong to yield to that sin. We think we can play with fire and not be burned.

4. Disobedience: James 1:15 the steps of sin are temptation, desire, sin, death.

5. Disgrace: When Christians fall into sin, especially moral failure, it brings shame and disgrace. They disgrace themselves, their family, their church, and their Lord.

"Lead us " How does God lead us?

1. God leads the willing Heart

If your heart is not willing for God to lead you, He can't lead you.

-When our dog, Spunky, was a puppy, Sherry tried to put a leash on him to lead him. He locked all four feet in place and refused to be lead. She ended up dragging him across the floor. We are that way sometimes when God tries to lead us.

2. God leads through the example of His Son.

The book, "In His Steps," asks the question, "What would Jesus Do"?

3. God leads by His Word – Ps. 119:105

4. God leads by His Holy Spirit – John 16:13

II. God Protects

No one is above yielding to temptation in all its many forms. No one! That's why we all need God's protection.

-We need to pray for the Lord's protection from temptation for several reasons:

1. Because we are so prone to failure

Though we are saved, we still have our old sin nature. Because of that, we all have a drive and hunger to sin. The capacity for sin dwells within our hearts.

-I Cor. 10:12 We are only tempted by the things that our own fallen nature desires. What tempts you might not even phase me, and what tempts me might not tempt you at all.

-James says that we are tempted when we are "drawn away by our own lust and enticed ." That is, when we are tempted, the old man is baiting the new man to go back to the old way of life.

-You see, we carry our sinful flesh and fallen nature with us every minute we live

2. Because temptation is so powerful

The person who gives in to temptation knows nothing at all of its power. Only the person who stands against temptation and wins the victory over it can testify to its great power.

-Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down.

-A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would be like an hour later. That's why bad people, in one sense, know very little about the power of temptation. They always give in to it.

-Jesus Christ is the only man who never yielded to temptation, and so He is the only man who knows the full power of temptation.

Every Christian has an enemy who hates them and wants nothing more than to see them fall and fail. The ultimate goal of our enemy is to use you and me to bring disgrace and dishonor to the name of the Lord Jesus.

But, thank God, the power of temptation is no match for the protection God gives us to win the battle over temptation.

1. We have God's Promises – 1 Cor. 10:31; 2 Peter 2:9a; Rom. 6:6-7, 11-15, 18

2. We have God's Indwelling Spirit – 1 John 4:4

3. We have the Armor of God – Eph. 6:10-18

III. God Expects

Because I love the Lord, I don't want to hurt Him by failing Him.

Steps for Victory over Temptation:

1. Fight – James 4:7 How did Jesus resist the devil in the wilderness? By the Word of God. The Word of God and prayer are the most powerful weapons we can use against Satan. Ps. 119:11

2. Follow – 2 Tim. 2:22 - Don't just flee as a last resort. If you see temptation coming, flee immediately. Don't deliberate or negotiate;

evacuate!

Victory is ours in the battle with temptation. If we will do our part, our Lord will do His part.

But let me caution you about something. Don't pray this prayer if you plan on placing yourself in places and situations where you will be tempted.

-Don't pray for the Lord to deliver you from the temptation of lust if you plan to go home and turn on a X-Rated video.

-Don't pray for the Lord to deliver you from the temptation of sexual sin if you go to work and flirt with those of the opposite sex.

-Don't pray for God to deliver you from the temptation of drink if you intend to go to a bar.

Victory is available, but only if we are serious about overcoming temptation.

A Beautiful Doxology Matthew 6:13b

If you read this "model prayer" in different translations or study it in different commentaries, you find a problem when you come to Matthew 6:13. The problem is that this benediction is not in the text of some modern translations of the Bible.

What's going on here? If these words are part of the "Model Prayer" why aren't they in the Bible? If these words aren't part of the "Model Prayer", who put them in the prayer and why did they do so?

-The Latin version that has been so revered by Roman Catholics did not contain these words.

-The NASB puts these last words of our text in brackets or italics.

-These words are omitted in the NIV and placed in a footnote.

-The NKJV has the words in the text, but they are footnoted. In other translations the words are found in the margin of the text.

So, why are the words found in some translations and not in others? To answer that question is to enter the fascinating world of textual criticism. Textual criticism is the study of various ancient manuscripts of the N.T. in order to determine which readings are original.

-There were no printing presses in the days when the N.T. books were written, so each copy had to be written by hand. Invariably when copies are made by hand, mistakes will creep in. Then when the copies of the copy are made, the mistake will be repeated, and other mistakes and omissions will occur.

-All in all, textual criticism is a complex field led by a few specialists who bury themselves in ancient manuscripts, pouring over the evidence and making their conclusions. The rest of us read the books they write and then make our own conclusions.

-We do know that while this benediction does not appear in Luke's version of the prayer, it is found in many of Matthew's version.

-It seems likely that Jesus taught this prayer to His disciples on more than one occasion, and He did not use the same word – for – word form. He may have added the benediction on some occasions, and on other occasions He may have omitted it.

-I regard the benediction as the legitimate words of Jesus. Everyone agrees that the words are both true and biblical. David used similar words in 1 Chron. 29:11-13. It would be difficult to compose a more fitting conclusion.

Notice that this prayer begins and ends in praise for God. We begin with "Thy Kingdom come" and end with "Thine is the Kingdom." We begin praying that God's name might be "hallowed" and we end with "and Thine is the glory for ever." We begin with "Thy will be done" and we end with "Thine is the power."

The doxology of the Model Prayer presents four major truths about God:

I. God is Sovereign

Jesus lifts us up out of our realm and causes us to think in Kingdom terms.

We have already encountered the "Kingdom" in the first half of this prayer. "For Thine is the Kingdom" brings the believer back to stay in constant focus that God is sovereign. He is in total control of everything. We can rejoice in His Preeminence.

-When we say that God is sovereign we mean that He is independent and holds complete power over and above this world.

“Kingdom” primarily points to the King as ruler, governor, and sovereign over His realm.

The greatest exhibition of God's Sovereign control is His anointing of His own Son to be King of this world. Scattered throughout the Bible are dozens of reminders that Jesus Christ is King. Here are just a few:

- He is King of Heaven – Dan. 4:37
- He is King of the Jews – Matt. 2:2
- He is King of Israel – John 1:49
- He is King of the Ages – I Tim. 1:17
- He is King of Glory – Ps. 24:7
- He is King of the Saints – Rev. 15:3
- He is King of Kings – I Tim.6:15

Dan 4:37 Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works *are* truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

Mat 2:2 Saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship him.

Joh 1:49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.

1Ti 1:17 Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, *be* honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Psa 24:7 Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.

Rev 15:3 And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous *are* thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true *are* thy ways, thou King of saints.

1Ti 6:15 Which in his times he shall shew, *who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;

It may look like the world is going crazy, but I assure you that God has the situation well in hand. All things, even evil things, are working out according to His plan. And, when the smoke settles and the dust clears, His will and purpose will be brought to pass.

-Our Father is still on the throne and no one will be able to ever dethrone Him. Ps. 45:6; 145:13

II. God is Powerful

Our God is a hands – on – God. He is actively involved every day in energizing this world and keeping it working. He has miraculous powers and divine ability.

-We do not serve some anemic, weak God. We serve a God of power and ability. He can do anything He pleases to do, because He holds all power. He is Almighty God!

Let me share some verses with you that speaks of His power: Gen. 18:14; Job 42:2; Ps. 62:11; Jer. 32:17; Rev. 19:6

Gen 18:14 Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.

Job 42:2 I know that thou canst do every *thing*, and *that* no thought can be withholden from thee.

Psa 62:11 God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power *belongeth* unto God.

Jer 32:17 Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, *and* there is nothing too hard for thee:

Rev 19:6 And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

It is far easier to list what God cannot do than to list what He can do. God cannot lie; He cannot change; He cannot make mistakes; He cannot fail.

-When we come before Him in prayer, we can pray with confidence because He has the power to hear us and grant our request.

III. God is Majestic

Everything God is doing as He exercises His preeminence and His power is for His glory.

-Ps. 8:1 God does what He does so that He might be honored by His creation. He does what He does so that men might be drawn before Him in worship. He does what He does so that his name might be exalted. He alone is glorious and He alone deserves glory!

-Our God is a jealous God, and he will not share His glory with another. Isa. 42:8

All that God does, He does for His glory. All that God does FOR US, all that God does IN US, all that God does THROUGH US, all that God does WITH US, He does for His glory.

Jesus said we are to let our light shine before men so they may see our good works and glorify – not us, but our Father, which is in Heaven (Matt. 5:16). The world sees the glory of God in the light of our good works. So, don't just pray for God's glory, give it to Him by doing good works in His name, which means we give Him credit for any good we do.

IV. God is Eternal – Mal. 3:6

We pray to the same God that Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Peter, John, and Paul prayed to. He has not changed or diminished in His Kingdom, Power, or Glory. His glory, power, and kingdom are “for ever”.

-John 17:24 says that one day, those who know the Lord, will behold His glory and share His glory forever. God and God alone determines who will share in His glory. Not for just a few days, but forever.

This prayer closes with the word “Amen.” What does “amen” mean? It means “so be it,” “Let it be so,” “I affirm this,” “It is going to be just like you said it will be Lord!”

How we should rejoice, because all that is His is ours because we are His.

Rom 8:17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer *with him*, that we may be also glorified together.

Fasting Without Fanfare Matthew 6:16-18

When we studied Matthew 6:1-5, we learned that Jesus deals with three acts of righteousness that should be in the believer's life. The first act of righteousness concerns giving. Jesus does not deal with WHAT we give, but HOW and WHY we give. We should not give so that men will praise us on how much we give, but our motive for giving should be to honor and please God as we obey Him. We should not give to call attention to ourselves; not to draw the applause from men, but because of our adoration and love for our Lord.

The second act of righteousness that Jesus mentions is prayer. Again, Jesus says that we should not pray for the purpose of impressing men, but to offer praise to God and to declare our dependence upon God.

The third act of righteousness that Jesus encourages from believers is fasting. In all three of these acts of righteousness, Jesus says that we are not to do our acts of righteousness in hypocrisy.

Jesus has something in common with many who don't attend church: Neither He nor they care very much for hypocrites in the church.

Some folks act as if they are surprised to find hypocrisy in the church, but it didn't appear to surprise our Savior at all. He knew that, because of Adam's sin, each of us have a sin nature. Hypocrisy abides in the heart of all of us – even in the hearts of his followers.

-The Pharisees were religious show – offs. They loved the limelight. They loved to be noticed and applauded. Jesus' counsel is: Don't be like them. Remember, “they have their reward.”

-The truth is, it is easy to fast with a wrong motive – to be seen and admired by men. Sometimes folks want to know what “fasting” is all about. “How long are we suppose to fast?” “What are we supposed to fast from?” “Can I still drink coffee or water when I fast?” “What is fasting supposed to accomplish?”

In Jesus' day, the practice of fasting was woven into the culture. It was expected; and it was a part of almost everyone's life. That is

not true in our day. We are never commanded to fast in the N.T. It is a voluntary thing for Christians today, but I do want us to look at the practice of fasting.

I. The Meaning of Fasting

The simplest definition for “fasting” is to voluntarily go without food or drink as a means of personal self-denial so that we can get before God for a time. Just this past week at the State Convention, I heard a preacher say that his son, who had just become a teenager, was fasting his Nintendo games so he could spend more time with God. Could that be considered a form of fasting?

People in the Bible fasted for two broad reasons: For direction and for liberation. In every scriptural account, genuine fasting is linked with prayer. We can pray without fasting, but we cannot fast biblically without praying.

A. Fasting is associated in the Bible with sorrow over sin – and repentance from it.

-Nehemiah led the people in confession of national sin by first calling them to assemble “with fasting, in sackcloth and with dust on their heads”. (Neh. 9:1)

Daniel prayed for national repentance, making “request by prayer and supplication, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes” (Dan. 9:3).

When Jonah preached to the Ninevites that God's judgment was coming, a national repentance occurred and they 'proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them” (Jonah 3:5).

During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln made a proclamation for a national fast-day. He set apart a Thursday, April 30, 1863, as a day of national humiliation, fasting, and prayer. Lincoln wrote: “It is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God; to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet, with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth announced in the Holy scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord. The awful calamity of Civil War which now desolates the land may be but a punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole people. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity, too proud to pray to the God that made us. It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.”

-May God raise up another Lincoln to call our nation to national humiliation, fasting, and prayer!

B. Fasting is associated with times of sorrow or mourning.

When it appeared that David's infant son was going to die, he “pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground” (2 Sam. 12:16).

C. Fasting is associated with seeking God's will or before doing some great task.

Queen Esther asked Mordecai to gather the Jews together and fast for her before she went before the King to appeal for the life of her people – Esther 4:16.

Jesus fasted forty days and nights before He was tempted in the wilderness and then began His preaching ministry – Matt. 4:1-2

The church fasted when seeking the will of God about Paul and Barnabas being sent out on missionary work – Acts 13:2-3

II. The Misuse of Fasting – Mt 6:13

This is a picture of self-denial turning into self-exaltation. These religious leaders would walk around in public with a gloomy look on their faces to give the appearance that they were afflicting their souls through fasting.

-True fasting is not a joyous occasion, but the truth of the matter was that these hypocrites were not sad at all. It was all a front, a show. They delighted in parading around town with a sad countenance because it resulted in people praising them for their superior piety.

The word “disfigure” means “to become unrecognizable through change in appearance.” They deliberately took means to drastically change their appearance and look pale and starved so that they might better advertise their fasting.

-The Pharisees loved to be viewed by people as extremely holy. They, like some in our day, craved to be called great men of God. Their fasting was motivated by pride, for they were eager for self – glory.

-Emotions are real things; and I believe that if there's a place in which real emotions ought to occur, it would be the church. But I can't help but feel that people sometimes display emotions in worship that they don't really feel.

Several years ago a church was observing youth week. Every position for youth week had been filled by the youth of the church except for preaching the sermon. A young lady was serving as the Pastor's secretary and the Pastor asked her if she would type his sermon for him. The Pastor often got emotional during his preaching, but the young lady was not prepared for what she was asked to type. In a certain place in the sermon, the pastor had written in large letters: "Cry here". She remembered where the "cry here" came in the sermon, and she said that, "Right on cue, the Pastor began to cry." Needless to say, that didn't enhance the young girl's respect for her Pastor.

Jesus said, "I say to you, they have their reward." The word indicates this is their total payment. What a cheap reward. The praise of men is not lasting, it is not satisfactory, and it will not show up in Heaven.

III. The Manner of Fasting – Mt 6:17-18

These were typically actions associated with feasting; not fasting! To clean up and care for yourself gives the exact opposite impact of disfiguring your face in a public display of agony because of fasting.

God's promise is that if we secretly seek His glory and not man's He will reward us. God sees in secret. God sees all and nothing will be overlooked or missed by him. The Lord is a good record keeper!

-Heb 6:10 For God *is* not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

-1Co 3:13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

-Rev 22:12 And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward *is* with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

Investing For Eternity Matthew 6:19-24

In Matthew 6, our Lord has been dealing with the righteous deeds of those of us who are "Kingdom Saints". He has talked about our Charitable deeds; those things we do to help our fellow man. Then He deals with the importance of prayer and even gives us a model of pattern of prayer. Then He spends some time dealing with fasting and the importance of getting along with God and communicating with Him.

-Now Jesus moves to a subject that touches all of our lives – money. Jesus said more about money than any other subject because it is so filled with danger for both the unsaved and the saved.

-In His parable of the soils, Jesus said that "the deceitfulness or riches" (Matt. 13:22) keeps many from trusting Christ and being saved.

-I Kings 10:23-11:7 tells us that wise Solomon let his wealth and his women make him an old fool.

-Paul told Timothy, "The love of money is the root of all evil" (I Timothy 6:10).

-Solomon said in Ecc. 5:10, "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money." When someone asked John D. Rockefeller, the richest man in his day, how much money it takes to make someone happy, he said, "Just a little more."

-Most of us spend all we make, just to make ends meet – or so we think. Suppose our income increased by \$20,000 a year. Would life be easier and would we have larger savings? I doubt it. Right away we would start thinking about a new car, a bigger house, a cabin on the lake. In time we'd be spending all we make "just to make ends meet" Why? Because as people's income goes up, so do their wants. Money never satisfies, it leaves us wanting a little more.

-HAPPINESS IS MORE WANTING WHAT WE HAVE THAN HAVING WHAT WE WANT.

Three things Jesus tells us in these verses.

I. Be Careful Where You Store Your Wealth – Mt 6:19-21

Before we were saved, there was only one place where we could lay up our treasures, and that's on earth. A lost man cannot lay up treasures in heaven.

-Once we are saved, we have a choice. We can choose to lay up treasures in Heaven, or we can lay up treasures on earth.

The words "lay up" means "to invest" or "to store". The word "treasure" comes from the same Greek word.

Everybody lays up treasures - even the poor. Treasures do not have to be something that you can hold in your hands. A treasure is anything that you place your affections and attentions on. It is that which you value above other things.

-It may be money, but it is not limited to money. A treasure is what a person most eagerly strives to attain, and that which he most dreads to lose.

What are "earthly treasures?" An "earthly treasure" is anything in this world that is EVERYTHING to you; that which is most important to you; that which you believe you cannot do without; that which brings you the greatest pleasure and satisfaction; and that which you think most about.

-It could be your reputation. Maybe it's your athletic or musical abilities that have taken over your heart's most valuable list. Maybe it's your looks or your hair or your physique, or your personality.

If you are laying up only earthly treasures, Jesus says that you can look forward to only loss, because they are temporal and will not have place or value in heaven.

-Jesus gives three illustrations of earthly treasures that the people of his day treasured up.

1.Garments: The wealthy would indicate their importance by having their garments stitched with golden thread. But Jesus reminded them that a single, small moth could ruin a valued garment.

2.Grain: Like the rich farmer that Jesus told about who made so much grain that he said he would build bigger barns to hold all his grain and Jesus told him that he was a fool. Why? Luke 12:21 says that the farmer laid up treasure for himself, and was not rich toward God. Jesus said that "rust" would destroy it. The word "rust" literally means, "eating". It conveys the idea of decaying or corroding or consuming a product, maybe by rats or some other vermin.

3.Gold: Those who treasure up gold could be robbed. Thieves could break in and steal all he has.

Jesus says that if you are laying up treasures on earth, all that you hold dear could be destroyed slowly, by moths and rust, or instantly, by thieves.

-If moth or rust can destroy it, if thieves can steal it, if the passing of years can diminish it, then you are storing up temporary, earthly treasures.

-**Mar 8:36** For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

So, what are Heavenly Treasures?

Let me tell you first what Jesus is NOT forbidding.

1.Jesus is not saying that it is wrong to have money or possessions

1Ti 6:17 Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;

1Ti 6:18 That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate;

1Ti 6:19 Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Do you have a nice home? Enjoy it. Do you drive a nice car? Enjoy it. Do you wear nice clothes? Enjoy them. There is nothing wrong with possessing possessions. What is wrong is when your possessions possess you.

2.Jesus is not saying that it is wrong to save for the future or to prepare for retirement.

Proverbs 6:6 says that we are to go to the ant and study her ways. She works hard, gathering in the summer so she will have provisions for the winter.

-I Tim. 5:8 says that if a man doesn't provide for his family, that he is worse than an infidel.

Then what is Jesus forbidding? The key lies in the little phrase "for yourselves". Jesus is forbidding the selfish, self-centered accumulating and hoarding and stockpiling goods as the major end to life. It pictures wealth that is not being used and is wasting away. It is shutting the Lord out of your life. Don't TREASURE UP TREASURES FOR YOURSELF ON EARTH!

Jesus now gives us some investment advice in Mt 6:20.

-Jesus wants us to store up treasures in heaven. And notice, He wants us to store them up FOR yourselves! He commands us to do what is in our best interest.

It is by faithfully serving God and others that we lay up treasures in heaven.

-In Matt. 19:29, Jesus says that if we serve and sacrifice for Him on earth, we will receive a hundred times as much in heaven. That's 10,000%! That's an impressive return.

-Anything we try to hang on to here will be lost, but anything we put in God's hands will be ours for eternity! Whatever treasures we lay up in Heaven will be waiting for us when we get there.

-Every day is an opportunity to buy up more shares in His kingdom. You see, Jesus is keeping track of our smallest acts of kindness while we serve Him here, even if we give a cup of cold water in His name (Matt. 10:42).

If you want to see what you have laid up in heaven, add up everything you have that money cannot buy and death cannot take away.

-Anything we do for the Lord on earth that has effects that last for eternity will be our treasure in Heaven.

We are to live with eternity in view, for one day we will give an account for our lives. We store up treasures in heaven in the day-by-day faithfulness that we exercise in relationship to Christ. It involves our disciplines, our relationships with others, the use of our financial resources, the use of our energies and time, the exercise of our spiritual gifts, and our acts of service to others.

Notice 6:21 Show me your checkbook or your credit card statements and I'll show you where your heart is.

-Suppose you buy 1,000 shares of General Motor Stock. What happens? You suddenly become interested in how many vehicles they sell; how the GM stock is doing. You may have never looked or cared about GM products before, but now you're interested.

-Do you want me to tell you how to love Christ and His Church and His Kingdom business more? Put your money and time and energy into it. Where you put those things, your heart will follow.

Some Christians dread the thought of leaving this world because they have more treasures stored up on earth than they do in heaven. When you lay up treasures in Heaven, you look forward to eternity. You realize you are moving daily toward your treasure. Death, for you, will be gain!

II. Be Careful How You See Your Wealth –Mt 6:22-23

"If the eye is single or sound or good" means a sighted person walks in light, but a person with an evil or blind eye walks in darkness.

-In scripture the "eye" is equivalent to the heart. Just as our eye affects our whole body, so our ambition (where we fix our eyes and heart) affects our whole life. Just as a seeing eye gives light and meaning to the body, so a noble and single minded ambition to serve God and man adds meaning to life and throws light on everything we do.

-It's all a question of vision. If we have physical vision, we can see what we are doing and where we are going. So too, if we have spiritual vision, our life is filled with purpose and drive. But if our spiritual vision becomes clouded, we lose our sense of values and our whole life is in darkness and we cannot see the importance of living in such a way as to lay up treasures in heaven.

So, what should we lay up as treasures in heaven? 2 Cor. 4:18

2Co 4:18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

1. Conversion: The first thing I want to deposit there is me. When we trust Christ, in His eyes we are already there.

2. Character: Christians will be judged and rewarded according to their works.

3. Contributions: Paul says that if we sow sparingly we'll also reap sparingly, but if we sow bountifully, we'll reap bountifully.

4. Conversions: When we win someone to the Lord, we help put the treasure of human soul in Heaven.

III. Be Careful Not To Serve Your Wealth –Mt 6:24

God can be served only with a complete and exclusive devotion. Some seek to diversify. They want to lay up some treasures on earth and some in heaven. Isa. 42:8a

-Jesus said of those folks, "I tell you, they have their reward." They have been paid in full on earth .

-1Co 3:11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1Co 3:12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

1Co 3:13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

1Co 3:14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

1Co 3:15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

Everyone gains and no one loses who lays up treasure in Heaven!

Why Do You Worry? Or, Worry Will Worry You To Death Matthew 6:25-34

Six times in ten verses, Jesus uses the word "worry." Three times Jesus commands. "Do Not Worry"_(6:25,31, 34). And then, almost as if Jesus knew we were going to worry anyway, He tells us how to deal with worry.

When Jesus says something one time, it's important. When He says something twice, it's really important. When He says something three times, we had better pay attention.

-Repetition in scripture not only emphasizes the weightiness of the instruction, but it also emphasizes the slowness of humanity to take heed to what was said.

If you have a KJV, you may be saying, "I don't see the word "worry" one time, much less six times." The phrase "take no thought" comes from the Greek word which means "fretting, anxious worry, burdened with cares." The Greek root word means "to divide, to be pulled in different directions, to strangle, to choke."

-If you are mowing the yard and you come to some tall, thick grass, the mower may choke down and even kill the engine. That's what worry will do in your life.

-Let me give you a simple definition of worry: worry is excessive concern over the affairs of life. The key obviously is the word "excessive". Worry happens when you are so concerned about the problems of life that you can think of nothing else. It is an all-consuming feeling of uncertainty and fear.

-Worry pits a person against themselves. Worry tears you apart inside and, yet, worry accomplishes no purpose and gets you nowhere.

-Worry is like a treadmill: it will wear you out, but it won't get you anywhere ...AND IT'S A SIN!

-In fact, it's the only sin I know of that people who worry brag about, I've never had anyone come to me and say, "O, Preacher, I cheated on a test" or "I've robbed a bank" or "I've been unfaithful to my mate", but I have had folks say, "O, Preacher, I've stayed up all night worrying about so and so"; "I stayed up all night gossiping about folks."

-Worry is one of those "acceptable" and "respectable" sins that we not only love to acknowledge, but brag about doing.

Why is worry sin?

1. Because to worry is to disobey God

Three times Jesus commanded us not to worry. To disobey God is sin (6:25, 31, 34). In 6:25, Jesus tells us to "stop worrying." In 6:31, Jesus says, "Don't start worrying." Jesus is saying, "If you are worrying, stop it, and if you are not worrying, don't start." "If you are worrying, get out of sin; and if you are not worrying, stay out of sin."

2. Because to worry says that we don't believe God can take care of our needs.

God has promised to take care of our needs – not our wants, but our needs, and to worry says that we don't trust God to do what He said He would do.

For every evil under the sun

There is a remedy, or there is none.

If there be one, seek it 'til you find it;

If there is none, never mind it.

There are two things we should never worry about: The things you can't change and the things you can change.

1. The things you can't change

If you can't change something, don't worry about it. There are some things you can't change. You can adjust your attitude toward them, ask God to give you grace in dealing with them, but worrying will not change them and only harm you, so don't worry about them.

2. The thing that, by God's grace, you can change.

If you can change something that needs to be changed, stop worrying about it and do something about it.

Let me tell you what worry IS NOT:

-Jesus didn't say for us not to Plan. In fact, Jesus says a wise man will plan. -Nor did Jesus say that we shouldn't be concerned. If we see a child playing too close to a busy street, concern will cause us to go get the child away from the street.

How can we tell when the legitimate concerns of life have become sinful worries? Here are three practical guidelines:

1. Concerns become worry when the thing you are concerned about is the first thing you think about in the morning and the last thing you think about at night.

2. Concerns become worry when you find yourself thinking about it during every spare moment.

3. Concerns become worry when you find yourself bringing it up in every conversation you have.

I. The Causes of Worry

It's interesting that the things Jesus said folks worried about 2,000 years ago are the very things that cause us to worry today.

A. They worried about Food – Mt 6:25,31

What folks worry about the most is daily needs FOR THE BODY. We worry about external matters. If we know the Lord has taken care of us internally, then we can be confident He will take care of us externally, too.

-As a Christian, I know that God has taken care of the real me. My Soul and Spirit have been renewed by the Lord. He has changed my life, saved my soul, and secured my eternity. Since he has taken such wonderful care of my internal being, I trust He will do the same with my external being. You see, life is more than what I eat and what I wear. The real me is the man inside, not what's on the outside.

Notice Mt 6:26, Become a bird watcher. If God takes Care of the birds, He'll take care of us. No farmer feeds his chickens and starves his children.

-There are millions and millions of birds, and all I've seen seem to be healthy and happy. None of them suffer from hypertension or ulcers or stress-related disease, and certainly, none of them are worrying. God takes care of them and none of them are farmers. None of them sow seeds or reap or gather into barns, but they are still provided for by God.

-Jesus is not encouraging us to be lazy and goof around. Birds instinctively make provisions for the future. The Father prepared the birds to do what they do – fly, sing, eat, build nest. They must be busy, working hard, or they will starve.

The point of our Lord's illustration is God's gracious care and He summed it all up by saying, "Are you not much better than they?"

Said the robin to the sparrow:

"I should really like to know

Why the anxious human beings

Rush about and worry so."

Said the sparrow to the robin:

"Friend, I think that it must be

That they have no Heavenly Father

such as cares for you and me.”

B. They Worry About Fashion – Mt 6:25, 28-30

What beautiful garments flowers wear. Jesus uses the word “arrayed” to describe them. The bloom is beautiful to the eye and the air is filled with its fragrance. God takes such care to make them beautiful and to make them smell so delightful; yet, they last such a short time.

-Think about it: Flowers don't have the advantages that birds have. Birds can at least hunt and peck, and build nest. Flowers just stand there, receiving their beauty and fragrance from God.

-It's not so much that we worry about having clothes to put on; we worry more about the style of clothes we wear. It's not that we may not have a shirt to wear, but do they have a man on a horse or a duckhead on them. Excessive!

C. They worry about Finances – Mt 6:19

Can God take care of my finances?

D. They worry about their Fitness – Mt 6:27

The word “stature” here may refer to length in height or to length in time. No matter how much you worry about how tall you are, all the worrying in the world isn't going to make you taller. And you can't extend your days on earth by worrying. You may shorten them by worrying.

E. They worry about the Future – Mt 6:34

No matter how much we worry, the future is not going to be revealed to us today. We don't know what's going to happen tomorrow or next month or next year, and God is good and gracious not to tell us. The best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time.

II. The Curse of Worry

Worry is unproductive. It accomplishes nothing. Worry is unnecessary. Our Heavenly Father knows what we have need of.

1. Worry is Foolish

Worry has never lifted a burden or solved a problem or made a house payment or car payment or rubbed out a single wrinkle. (It has added a few.)

2. Worry is Fruitless

Someone said that worrying is like shoveling smoke. You're not any better off when you're done than you were when you started.

-A third grade teacher was trying to teach her class how to use fractions. She said to a little boy on the front row, “Billy, what is 3/4 of 5/16?” He said, “Miss Smith, I don't know what it is, but it's not enough to worry about.”

3. Worry is Faithless

Worry insults God. Rather than trusting God, we doubt God. Worry says that my problem is too big for God to handle.

-Listen : Don't worry about anything that is under God's control. What is there in your life that God is not big enough to handle?

III. The Cure For Worry – Mt 6:33

Jesus is talking about getting our priorities in order. Everything rises and falls right here. If our priorities are not right, we will not be right.

-“Seek first” means “to actively pursue” or “to go after.” And it must be done continuously. Every day of your life you ought to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

-Seek His Kingdom: Make sure first of all that you are in His Kingdom. Make sure you are saved. Then actively pursue His righteousness. It means that daily you seek to be close to God and clean before God.

There was something that I used to worry about that I don't worry about any more. I used to wonder what would happen to me if I were to die. I don't worry about that any more, because I have had a personal faith experience with the Lord Jesus and He forgave

my sins and gave me His gift of eternal life.

May I tell you that worrying about your eternal destiny will not get you to heaven. God is big enough and powerful enough and loving enough to do something about your sins and your lost condition. That's why He said that we are to seek first his Kingdom.

If you are worried about your eternal destiny, settle it now.

Are You A Faultfinder? Matthew 7:1-5

Are you a faultfinder? When Jesus talks about judging here, He is really talking about and rebuking faultfinding.

-A faultfinder is one who finds much to criticize or complain about. Synonyms for a faultfinder are:

nag, critic, grouch, grumbler, and bellyacher. They are mean-spirited slanderers. They always look for the worse in folks instead of the best.

One commentator calls faultfinders "spiritual vultures." Like the vultures of the air that live off dead, rotting flesh, these sad individuals thrive on the mistakes and sins of others. They fly across the landscape, keeping a close eye out for the failures of others. Then they swoop in for their daily feast.

-You always see what you're looking for. Send a botanist into the woods and he'll find beautiful flowers, leaves, and trees. Send a buzzard into the woods and he'll find a dead animal with maggots covering it. Why? That's what he's looking for.

It's almost impossible to please some folks. I'm reminded of the bachelor who wanted to get married, but everytime he brought a prospective wife home, his mother criticized her unmercifully. Well, he didn't know what to do and he was talking to a friend one day and his friend said, "Why don't you find someone who is just like your mother?" He said, "That's a good idea." So he looked and he looked until he found, what was in essence a clone of his mother. She looked like his mother; She walked like his mother; She talked like his mother; She even thought like his mother. He called his friend and said, "Well, I'm going to take her home today. I'll let you know how it goes." The next day his friend called him up and said, "How did it go?" The bachelor said, "Terrible." The friend asked, "Why?" He said, "Well, my mother loved her, but my father couldn't stand her."

Someone said, "It takes no size to criticize." Whether we admit it or not, we all engage in judging from time to time. Few things grieve the Holy Spirit more than a critical, judgmental, faultfinding spirit.

Three things I want to share with you from this passage:

I. The Rebuke Against Faultfinding – Mt 7:1

Few portions in the Bible are so misinterpreted, misunderstood, and misapplied as this section of scripture.

-Some say that a Christian should never, under any circumstances, judge anything. If Christians speak against homosexuality or abortion or immorality, or other sins, the world says, "Shame on you. You now better than that. The Bible says, "Judge not." Listen: the things God has already condemned have already been judged – by Him! Christians are not judgmental about those things; God has already judged them. In fact, Lev. 19:17 says that it is wrong NOT to point out our brother's sins in the right spirit or we will share in his guilt.

If these verses are commanding us to never judge, they contradict scripture in many places. Matt. 7:6,15

- I Cor.2:15 - "But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one."
- I Cor. 6:2 - "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?"
- I Cor. 6:3 - "Do you not know that we shall judge angels?" (The Lord Himself will judge fallen angels, but we will have some rule in eternity over holy angels.)
- I John 4:1 – We are to judge between true teachers of the Word of God and those who are false teachers.

Jesus says, "Do not Judge." Literally, the Greek puts the "not" first in the sentence; so it will read "not judge or stop judging." Jesus is saying to stop doing what is already in progress; Stop condemning and stop criticizing others. In other words, Jesus condemns condemnation of others.

The intention of the faultfinder is to be malicious toward others. What he says may be true, but he speaks without any desire to build up or to instill discernment. He only wants to make himself look good, to enhance his own reputation, or to demean the person about whom he is speaking.

Why do people tend to judge and criticize others?

1. Criticism of others boosts our own self-image.

Pointing out someone else's failure and tearing him down makes us seem a little bit better, at least in our own eyes. It adds to our pride and self-image.

2. Criticism of others is often enjoyable.

There is a tendency in human nature to take pleasure in hearing and sharing bad news and reveling in the shortcomings of others.

3. Criticism of others makes us feel that our own lives are better than the person who failed.

4. Criticism of others is an outlet to hurt and revenge.

We think, "He hurt me so I will hurt him by exposing his sins and faults and failures. So we blow things about others all out of proportion. Even if what we are telling is true, we tell the truth in order to hurt others.

Here is guide to help guide our speech: Ask yourself: Is it true; is it kind; is it necessary; will it encourage; will it edify? If not, remain silent.

II. The Reasons Against Faultfinding – Mt 7:3-5

Notice the word "Why" in Mt 7:3. Jesus is asking, "What right do you have to judge your brother?"

A. We all fail God and sin - 1 John 1:8-10

Notice the word "beam." The word denotes a huge piece of wood, like a two – by – four – maybe a rafter in a house.

-Now notice the word "mote". The word denotes a small piece of sawdust. What I want you to notice is that they are both of the same substance – both are wood. One is just larger than the other.

-Here's the problem: The one who is judging has the same sin in his life as the man that he is judging, but he is blind to his own sin, though the sin is greater in his own life. A self-righteous person looks at himself, even with his great sin, and still sees only goodness.

An O.T. example of the mote and the beam is found in the life of King David. David is at the lowest point morally in his life. He took Uriah's wife and committed adultery with her. When Bathsheba revealed to David that she was pregnant, David schemed to have Uriah murdered, thinking that he could hide his sin and take Bathsheba for his own. Nathan the prophet found out what David did and confronted him by telling him a story about a rich man with huge flocks of sheep who lived next door to a poor man. The poor man had only one little ewe lamb that he loved like a daughter, but the rich man, not wanting to take a lamb out of his own herds to feed some guest, took that little lamb and slaughtered it. David was furious. David's response was; "That man deserves to die. He must repay everything fourfold." Nathan pointed a prophetic finger at David and said, "You are that man." David had a beam in his eye that needed to be removed.

-Rom. 2:1 Jesus wants us to get our focus off the weaknesses of others and consider our own faults first, for a reason. The purpose of self-judgment is to prepare us to serve others. If we do not get the beam out of our own eye, we blind ourselves to ourselves and then cannot see clearly enough to help others.

The judgmental person who looks at the tiny speck in someone else's eye must get close enough to peer into the other person's eye. That means that he is spending far too much time and attention looking at others, and far too little considering his own life.

-Here's the sad thing. The person with the beam in his eye thinks he can see clearly enough to do the delicate work of helping remove a speck from someone else's eye.

-It is only when we prayerfully and humbly ask the Holy Spirit to search our hearts and turn His divine gaze upon us and expose our own sin, that we begin to notice the beam that has blinded our own sight.

-Do you regularly ask the Lord to expose your sin so that you might confess and repent of it? Psalm 139:23-24

B. We never have all the facts

We judge on the basis of what we see, but the problem is, we can't see everything and we don't know everything.

Before the x-ray machine, doctors made decisions based only on what they could see and touch outwardly... And they made many mistakes because of it. You and I cannot see the heart or motive of a person and what we seem to see is not always the true facts. We have all jumped to a hasty conclusion about someone, only to find out later we were dead wrong.

-Jerry Vines: In revival and all the time he was preaching a lady was making faces at him. He became so irritated...he talked to the pastor. The pastor said, "Oh, she is deaf. She is trying to read your lips and sometimes she gets so into the sermon and that's the only way she can express herself.

-1 Sam. 1 Eli saw Hannah in the temple...her eyes were wet and her lips were moving, but no sound was coming. Eli said, "How long will you be drunk? Put away your wine from you." She said, "I am not drunk, but a woman of sorrow...I want a child so badly.."

-Acts 2 – The Day of Pentecost... Those folks are drunk...Peter said, "No, they are filled with the Spirit."

-When we judge without all the facts, it can do such harm:

Listen to this true story about a girl named Gloria. One morning at seven o'clock, Gloria arrived home and was observed by a neighbor woman. Gloria came home in a car driven by a strange man. Her clothes were rumpled and disarrayed, and she staggered when she walked to the front door of her house. The neighbor woman knew that Gloria had gone to a party on a college campus in a nearby community the evening before. The woman began to tell about Gloria and the party in the nearby community; how it went into the wee hours; how the boys and girls began to pair off – and you do not need anyone to add the details to that. So Gloria was observed arriving home at seven o'clock the next morning; getting out of an automobile driven by a strange man; her clothes not in the best condition; staggering somewhat as she walked to the front door of her house. In time Gloria heard the talk in town. She would walk down the street and people would not speak to her. She got icy stares, and she became aware of the whispering behind her back when she was in a group. Gloria was a very sensitive person and was crushed by such treatment. She wrote in her diary: "I did not do what they say I did; I wish I were dead." Gloria took an overdose of sleeping pills and, uncalled by God she rushed to eternity. But here are the true facts. Gloria had gone with some girl friends to a party on a college campus in a nearby community. Through no fault of their own, they missed the last bus back home. They spent the night in the girls' dormitory with the knowledge and consent of the parents. The next morning one of the fathers drove to the nearby community to pick up the girls and deliver each one to her house. And so it was that at seven o'clock in the morning, Gloria got out of the car driven by a strange man; her clothes in disarray because she had slept in them; staggering somewhat because she had not slept that much.

You be careful before you open your mouth. You never know what the end result will be. Injury is done to the person judged.

If you are going to judge, begin with yourself.

Faults in others I can see,

But praise the Lord, there's none in me!

III. The Reaping of Faultfinders –Mt 7:2

Our Lord reminds us of a cardinal truth of scripture. We reap what we sow and with what measure we

mete, it shall be measured to us again. The warning is that if we judge in the wrong manner, we will be judged in the same way by the same standard.

-The question is, "Who will be doing the judging? I think the passive voice is probably referring to divine judgment rather than human judgment, though it is obvious that it will happen on the human level as well. The reason I believe this to be true is that the overall theme of Matthew 7 is dealing with judgment.

So the question that each of us has to face in the light of this passage is this: Am I willing to be judged by the same standard that I judge others? If I question another's behavior, is my behavior exemplary and approved by God.

We cannot ignore how God will deal with us if we improperly judge others – Psalm 18:25-26 (v.26 "with the devious you will show yourself shrewd" God will permit us to reap what we have sown.)

-We set the standard and tone for our own final judgment by our judgmental conduct in this life. If we judge others harshly, we condemn ourselves by the standards we have set.

Let me remind you that this verse also teaches that when we are kind, patient, and fair with others, we will reap the same kind of treatment.

If we sow blessing, we will reap blessing.

“Judge not, that you be not judged.”

Dogs and Hogs Matthew 7:6

This verse is one of the “hard sayings” of Jesus. Several times in the Gospels, Jesus spoke, what many Bible students refer to as hard sayings.

-For example, in John 6 Jesus said, “I am the Bread of Life.” Then He said, “Verily, Verily, I say unto you, except you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53, 60). Many of His disciples responded, “This is a hard saying; Who can hear it?”

Back in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Judge not, that you be not judged. (7:1). Now He says, “Don't give that which is holy to dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine.” But how can you obey Matt. 7:1 without making a judgment about another person, as well as making a discernment about someone's life? Our Lord's command in 7:6 requires us to judge in dealing with others. It is obviously necessary that we judge so we can determine who are dogs and swine.

It is important to understand that in Matthew 7:1-5, Jesus is saying that BELIEVERS are not to judge or condemn or criticize BROTHERS and SISTERS in Christ. That is, Matthew 7:1-5 deals with believers judging believers. In Matthew 7:6, Jesus is referring to BELIEVERS judging NON-BELIEVERS. So, Matthew 7:6 deals with unbelievers.

Jesus often spoke of His followers as sheep or lambs, but never as dogs or hogs. Instead, He describes the lost man as dogs or hogs.

Three things I want to share with you as we study this verse:

I. The Explanation

Jesus talks about that which is Precious and that which is Perverse; that which is Valuable and that which is Vile.

A. That which is Precious

What does our Lord mean by that which is “holy” and that which he calls “your pearls?”

1. That Which is Holy

The word “holy” here means anything connected which scriptural admonitions, precepts, or Bible doctrine.

-The Jews of Jesus' day would naturally think of meat that was offered as a sacrifice on the altar before the Lord. When the sacrifice was offered unto the Lord, it was holy or separate for the use of the Lord. When a sacrifice was offered unto the Lord, some parts of the sacrifice were burned up, some parts were eaten by the priests, and some would often be taken home and eaten by the family who made the sacrifice. The part left on the altar was the part which was consecrated exclusively to the Lord, and therefore was holy in a very special way. It would be unthinkable for a Jew to throw a piece of holy meat, that had been consecrated as a sacrifice in the Temple, to the dogs. To throw a part of the holy meat to a bunch of wild, filthy dogs would be the height of desecration. But there are men and women that treat that which is holy and precious with that kind of contempt.

2. That which is Precious

It is interesting to note that the Greek word translated “pearls” is the word that we get our English word “Margaret” from. So, if your name is Margaret, your name means “a precious Pearl.”

-Pearls are precious stones found in shell-fish, chiefly in India. They are used symbolically to denote the doctrines of the Gospels. Pearls, because of their high value, make a good figure of the spiritual and moral character values which are the most valuable things in life. These valuable pearls include the Word of God, purity, honesty, integrity, virtue, and faithfulness.

B. That which is Perverse

Dogs in N.T. days were not domesticated lapdogs. They were scavengers and mongrels that would snarl and growl and bark and bite. They were unclean.

In the Jewish mind hogs were filthy, vile, contemptible and unclean. A hog's nature is unclean. It loves

the mud and mire. And a pig is openly unclean. It doesn't care who sees it wallow in the mire.

-You can take a hog, wash him, put perfume on him, a bow around his neck, a little skirt on him, turn him loose and he heads for the mud. It's his nature.

These two animals serve together as a picture of what is vicious, unclean, and abominable. The effect of sin and evil upon man as a result of the Fall is to make us, with respect to the truth of God, dogs and swine.

-Men who are "dogish" and "pigish" are corrupt, polluted, profane, and sensual. Sin makes men brutal, vicious, vile, cruel, and filthy. Sin makes a man have a terrible sense of values and makes them have contempt for the things of God and for that which is pure and right.

II. The Exposition

The Bible points out at least three classes of lost people:

1. Those who are lost because they have never heard the Gospel.

No one has ever told them the Good News that Jesus came to earth to give His life a ransom for their sins. He came to seek and to save and to forgive our sins that we might be right with God.

-I'm glad I can say that the number of those who have never heard the Gospel is shrinking every day. With the help of missionaries, Christian radio and T.V., there aren't many places on earth where the gospel is not proclaimed.

2. Those who have heard the gospel and are contemplating becoming a Christian, but as of now have not trusted Jesus. They are thinking about it, maybe the Holy Spirit has convicted them of their sin, but they have not yet decided to follow Him.

3. Then there are those who have heard the Gospel and have not only rejected the Gospel, but ridicule and scoff the Gospel and the messenger of the Gospel. These are the dogs and hogs Jesus talks about.

Here is what Jesus is teaching: Some folks are so opposed to the gospel that any attempt to share the

Gospel results in ridicule, mocking, and scoffing. Jesus said, "Don't give what is holy and spiritually valuable to those kind of folks." Why? Let me answer with scripture concerning those Jesus describes as dogs and hogs.

A.2 Peter 2:22; Proverbs 26:11

No matter what you do externally for a pig, his nature is not changed. He may look different, for a while. He may act differently, for a while. But there is no change on the inside; in his nature.

-All a pig is interested in is satisfying his pigish hunger. He will not accept or receive anything that doesn't satisfy his pigish hunger. That's why he rejects and disrespects pearls and tramples them under foot. He has no taste and no desire for precious, valuable things. So it is with some lost folks. The pig will never be anything but a pig and some lost men will never be anything but a lost man because he despises the things of God.

Then, the dog. The dog does a disgusting thing by nature. He eats something that makes him sick to his stomach and he vomits. Then he turns around and begins to eat his own vomit. Disgusting! He eats again the very thing that made him sick!

-What do you do when you vomit? If it's convenient, you flush it. If you can't flush it, you get away from it. You certainly don't stand there and admire it and desire it. It is a loathsome sight.

Jesus is telling us how disgusting and loathsome sinners are in His sight.

-Here is a man, who was "made a little lower than the angels" (PS. 8:5) and even "made in the likeness of God" (Gen. 1:26), who was given dominion over the animals, even calling all the animals before him and giving them names, who has sunk to such a degrading level. Satan promised Eve, partake of that which is forbidden by God and "you shall be as gods," but they became as beasts.

-What do sinners often do when they get into some sin that makes them miserable? Something that hurts them and shames them? Something that makes them feel bad. But when the sickness has passed away, and the sweetness of the forbidden fruit comes to their minds again, they go again to the forbidden thing.

-It's disgusting when we see a dog going right back to that which made sick, but we do the same thing. Would that we would have the same disgust at the sin and its effects it has on us, that we may turn away from it. That's the folly of sin: we turn right back to it again.

-Take the drunk who wallows in his own vomit, says and does stupid things when he's under its influence. The drink harms his body, his relationships, and his finances, but he keeps going back to it. The person living in immorality thinks they are having fun, but there is no real love and commitment and down deep they know they are being used by the other person, but they repeat the same sorry lifestyle and try to convince themselves they're enjoying themselves, though they go from one hurtful experience to another.

B. Proverbs 23:9; 9:7-9

Notice the word "scorner." A scorner is a person who refuses to receive Christian truth. They are wicked men and women who have no respect for the most valuable things of life. They despise the things of God and don't hesitate to use God's name in vain. They mock and belittle and curse when you try to present the Gospel.

-I went to a man's house to share the gospel with him and to invite him to church. He would not let me in his house, but said, "I don't want to hear it and don't come back." He was what the Bible calls "a

Scorner." Why would he respond that way? He became angry, not because I didn't come to him in a loving, kind, caring, friendly spirit, for I did. He got angry and didn't want to hear the Gospel because the Bible condemns his lifestyle. The Bible condemns sins like adultery, lying, cheating, stealing, and greed. It condemns jealousy, anger, hatred, and seeking revenge.

So what do we do when we are confronted by a scorner? Jesus said, "Don't give that which is holy unto the dogs (scorners), neither cast your pearls before swine (scorners), for they will turn and rend you."

-When there is no respect for the gift, there will be no respect for the giver. They will "rend" the giver with slander, mocking, rejection, intimidation, hatred, verbal abuse, and sometimes physical abuse.

-There are times that we must make the judgment to turn away and speak no more to them, deciding that we should "shake off the dust off our feet" and share the gospel somewhere else – Matt. 10:12-14; Acts 18:6. We are not to waste God's Holy Word not waste our time in a futile and frustrating attempt to win them as long as they have this kind of attitude.

III. The Encouragement

So what in the world do we do with these kinds of people? Are we to abandon them as hopeless? Is the Gospel to be totally withdrawn from them?

-Listen: I have found that time and trials have a way of softening the hearts of people.

The testimony of believers can also change a person's heart. What Christian words cannot do, a Christian life can often do.

-Jude 17-23 (snatching or plucking them from the fire of hell.)

With those folks who remain hardened toward God, we are to leave them to the Lord trusting that somehow, His Spirit can penetrate their stony hearts as He has done before. As long as a man has breath in his body, there is hope for him. Don't give up on him.

-Leave them alone until a possible later time when there is a change in their heart, and go to others who are more receptive.

Knocking On Heaven's Door Matthew 7:7-11

Prayer is not a new subject in the Sermon on the Mount. Our Lord has already given instructions on secret prayer or praying in private instead of praying to be noticed by men. He has warned about meaningless repetition. He has also given us a pattern and taught us to set priorities in our praying. Those priorities include: Giving honor to our God, Extending His rule to the ends of the earth, Expressing our dependence upon the Lord for daily bread, forgiveness, and deliverance from temptation.

For the child of God, prayer is both a privilege and a priority.

-God not only invites us to come before His throne of grace in prayer; He commands us to come! Notice Hebrews 4:16. The "gods" of other religions are unapproachable, but not our God! He calls for all of us to come confidently before His throne to receive mercy and grace through Jesus Christ.

-If God commands us to pray, then not to pray is a sin – I Samuel 12:23-24

1Sa 12:23 Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way:

1Sa 12:24 Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great *things* he hath done for you.

When we don't pray, we commit sin on three fronts: we sin against the Lord who commands us to pray; we sin against others who depend upon us to pray for them; we sin against ourselves and deny ourselves the blessing that comes when we pray.

-There are two broad types of sin. There are the sins of commission when we do something that God has told us not to do. But there is also the sins of omission, where we fail to do what God has instructed us to do. See James 4:17.

Jas 4:17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him it is sin.

God has instructed us to pray and if we fail to do so, it is sin.

-Billy Graham said that Heaven is full of answered prayers for which no one ever bothered to ask.

The Imperatives of Prayerfully

The word "ask" appears five times in Matthew 7:7-11. God wants us to ask Him. We have not because we ask not. He is waiting for us to knock on the door of Heaven; asking Him to help.

-In English those three words – Ask, Seek, Knock – even form an acrostic: ASK. When it comes time to pray, we should be asking the Lord.

Have you ever wondered why God wants us to pray? He already knows our needs. Why ask Him to do something He already wants to do? We don't inform God through our prayers, so why does He want us to pray?

-There is no substitute for prayer. Nothing can take its place – not energy; not intelligence; not enthusiasm.

Why Pray?

A. Because of the Fellowship Factor

God doesn't just want to give us things and meet our needs, He wants to have fellowship with us.

-Emmanuel Scott, the black preacher, tells of his daughter who is a single parent. Her young teenage son wanted some Air Jordons. They cost a hundred and ten dollars. She explained that he would have to get a cheaper pair of shoes because that was over her budget. When Emmanuel came in, the boy crawled up in his lap, hugged and kissed him and asked for the shoes. He then went and bought them for the boy. The mother of the boy was upset and said to her dad, "I told him they were too expensive and then you went and bought them for him because he crawled up in your lap and hugged and kissed you. It's not right." Emmanuel said, "I didn't buy them because he crawled up in my lap, kissed me and asked for them. I bought them because of all the times he crawled up in my lap, hugged me, told me he loved me and didn't ask for anything."

-You do know, do you not, that God just wants to have fellowship with us at times without us asking for anything.

B. Because of the Development Factor

Nothing will help our Spiritual development and growth more than prayer. The reason God doesn't answer our prayers immediately is because He wants us to grow some more. If He answered all our prayers on the spot, we would not experience much growth.

C. Because of the Dependence Factor

There are many things we cannot do for ourselves and so we must depend upon God. That's the way God designed it.

-Prayer does three things in our life. It reminds us of our weakness apart from God's grace; it reminds us to look to God as our Father; it disciplines and humbles us to receive the Father's gracious provisions so that we might live as Kingdom Saints.

-When we approach the Lord in prayer, we are not to have a cocky, proud, demanding spirit. We are to approach Him with humility in asking, recognizing our needs and limitations.

II. The Instructions in Prayer – Mt 7:7-8

"Ask...Seek...Knock" each is a little more intense. Each time Jesus uses the present imperative tense. It would sound something like this: "Keep on asking! Keep on Seeking! Keep on knocking! Keep at it! Be Persistent! Don't give up until you receive the answer!"

Don't give up on prayer. Have you ever knocked on someone's door and run away before they could answer? That's what we often do in prayer.

-Dr. Howard Hendricks prayed for 40 years for his dad to be saved. He was saved, two weeks before he died. Dr. Hendricks said that he was so glad that he didn't stop praying.

Sometimes we quit too soon. A little five year old girl was watching her mother rubbing cold cream on her face. She asked her mother why she was doing that. The mother said that she was doing it to make herself beautiful. A minute later the mother began removing the cream with tissue. As she watched her mother, she said, "What's the matter? Giving up already?" Sometimes we give up too quickly!

It is always important to read the words of the Bible in their context, and it is true in this passage. You see, not everyone has a right to this invitation. Jesus isn't inviting everyone in the world to ask things of His Father. He is speaking to a specific group. He is speaking to those who are His disciples – to His devoted followers, to those who believe on Him, to those who obey His teaching.

-Now that may seem harsh and unfair, but remember that God never prohibits anyone from believing on Jesus and becoming His child. In fact, He has gladly made every provision possible for anyone who believes on Jesus to become His child, even the worst sinner in the world. So let me ask you, have you placed your trust in Christ? Are you His child by faith in the cross of Jesus?

If you are His child, Jesus instructs us as what to do.

A. Ask

There is the starting point. In fact, if you take all three elements, A-ask, S-see, K-know, they form an acrostic. All three words increase in intensity and effort on our part.

-"Ask" implies asking for a conscious need in our lives. But Jesus goes a step further. He says to ask persistently. Ask, but if you don't get an answer, keep on asking.

But to get the full scope of what Jesus is saying, we must compare scripture with scripture.

- We must ask according to God's will – I John 5:14-15

1Jn 5:14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

1Jn 5:15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

- We must ask from a life of faithful obedience – I John 3:22-23

1Jn 3:22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

1Jn 3:23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

- We must ask in Jesus' name or in His authority – John 14:13-14; 15:16

Joh 14:13 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

Joh 14:14 If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do *it*.

Joh 15:16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

B. Seek

Not only are we to ask, but if we don't get an answer, we are to seek. Seek what? What are we to seek? God desires that we seek Him out. Jer. 29:13

Jer 29:13 And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

The word "seek" means to look for something earnestly and intently. It suggest a craving desire to investigate and a diligent search, not a casual kind of search. It involves effort and energy. We are to continually seek.

-We can't expect God to get serious about answering our prayer if we are not serious and sincere in Praying our prayer. It is the effectual, fervent prayer that is effective – James 5:16. (the words “effectual fervent” gives us our English word “energy”. Prayer is hard work and takes energy.)

C. Knock

“Ask” has to do with our Dependence; “Seek” deals with Desire: “Knock” has to do with Determination.

-We “ask”, and if we don't get an answer, we go and “seek” His Person. Asking leads into seeking.

Sometimes, when we feel our prayers are not being heard, we go seeking the Lord. Perhaps there is sin in our lives, hindering our fellowship with Him, so we start looking around, examining our lives and making sure we are clean before Him.”Knocking” pictures a person standing outside a house, knowing the one we need is inside, so we begin knocking on the door.

-One knocks on a door that is closed. Sometimes when we pray to the Lord, the door appears closed. We may feel we are not getting anywhere and get discouraged. The Lord, however, wants us to keep knocking on His door. We are to demonstrate our faith in Him by continuing to bring our petitions before Him – James 1:6

Jas 1:6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

-Is there a time to stop praying for a certain thing? That time comes when the Lord clearly impresses upon our heart that he is saying “no” to our request. If His answer to our request is “no”, He has a good reason to say no.

III. The Impact of Prayer – Mt 7:8-11

In 7:7, Jesus stresses the command; in Mt 7:8 He stresses the results. Again, He uses the present tense. The always – asking one keeps on receiving; the always – seeking one keeps on finding; the always – knocking one keeps on finding the door open. Luke 11:5-10

Notice 7:9-11, God is not deceptive in His giving. He does not trick us when we ask for certain things by giving us things which look like the things we request, but but in fact are not.

-If an earthly father would not deceive his son in giving to him, neither will our Heavenly Father. God has better character than to be deceitful and play mean tricks on people who come to Him in honest prayer.

Our God is good. He delights to answer our prayer.

Our God is wise. He would not give us the wrong thing. He knows exactly what we need.

Our God is able. He has power to answer our prayers. Eph. 3:20

Eph 3:20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

The Golden Rule Mathew 7:12

This is one of the most famous statements that Jesus ever made. We call it the golden Rule. It is golden. When the English word “golden” is used, it is referring to something excellent or precious. So the golden Rule is a precious truth, a principle of ethics that is of unmeasurable worth. It is the principle of conduct that all of God's children are to live by.

The so-called “Golden Rule” is not unique to Christianity! But there is something very unique about the golden rule as Jesus stated it, and the way Jesus put it makes His version of it above all others.

-For example, this golden rule is found in Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. The

difference between Jesus' version of the golden rule and that of other religions is that all others is stated in the negative instead of the positive, as Jesus stated it.

-Confucius, for example, is credited as having said, “Do not to others what you would not wish done to yourself.” The O.T. Apocrypha states, “Do not do to anyone what you yourself would hate.” Rabbi Hillel said, “What is hateful to you, do not do to anyone else.”

The difference between the negative and the positive form might seem on the surface to be insignificant, but there is a major

difference:

- The negative form is the appeal of Law for Control!
- The positive form is the Appeal of Love for Growth!

Jesus' teaching on the "Golden Rule" goes far beyond any other religion's teaching on the same subject because instead of trying to control negative behavior, it encourages behavior motivated by love.

-Jesus spoke of doing to others proactively – that is, He said we should seek ways to do good toward others. That's a whole new way of looking at an ancient truth. And the rule or principle as Jesus gave it will apply to Everything!

I. The Meaning of the Golden Rule

You and I live on one of three levels:

1. "Do unto others BEFORE they do it unto you."

Again, this is a negative approach. We think someone is going to do us wrong, so we figure out some way of getting them before they get us. I know folks like that.

2. "Do unto others AS THEY do unto you."

It's kind of an eye for an eye deal. If someone treats you kindly, then treat them kindly. But, if someone treats you badly, you treat them badly. "Do unto them as they do unto you!"

3. "Do unto others AS you would have them do unto you."

This is actually applying the Great Commandment – Matthew 22:36-40.

-Treat people the same way you want them to treat you. Jesus is commanding positive action toward others. Kingdom Saints are to go on the offensive by treating people in the way that they want to be treated. With the same graciousness, kindness, integrity in relationships, generosity, gentleness that you want to be treated, you treat others that way.

Think what would happen overnight if everyone faithfully obeyed this one verse: There would be no more fighting between relatives, spouses, or nations. It would lead to the end of all wars. It would lead to the transformation of this world into a paradise of peace and harmony.

The problem is that our hearts are still in darkness. We are self-centered and bent on following our own desires. We are basically selfish. We sin because we are so preoccupied with self.

Why do we lie? Because we think we can gain greater benefit from it.

Why do we cheat? To appear smarter than we really are.

Why do we steal? To have something that we don't have.

Why do we commit adultery? To gain some pleasure for self.

The Golden Rule means that grace is to operate through our lives in every way possible. Grace puts "us" at risk rather than the "object" of our grace.

After the U.S.S. Pueblo was captured by the North Koreans, the 82 surviving crew members were thrown into a brutal captivity. Thirteen men were taken into a room and were made to sit in a rigid manner around the table for hours. Hours later, the door was slung open and a North Korean guard walked in and savagely beat the man in the first chair, but no one else. The next day the same thing happened. They were each assigned the same seats, so the same man was beaten again. The third day the same thing happened. These Americans knew how that the same thing would happen each day. They knew their fellow sailor could not survive another beating. As they sat down on the fourth day in the same chairs, one American sailor got up and changed seats with his beaten friend. The guard came in and beat the man in the first chair and left. So each day, they all took turns sitting in the first chair and continued to rotate each day so someone different was beaten up every day. Only one man had to be beaten, the one assigned the first chair, but love moved them to accept being beaten in order to save one another. This is grace at work! Finally the North Koreans gave up the beatings. Instead of breaking the men, it united them to become even stronger. Love and grace won against Law!

II. The Motive for the Golden Rule

Notice the first word in 7:12. When you see the word “therefore,” you need to go back to see what it is there for. The Golden Rule ought to be our lifestyle because of the truths Jesus has already taught.

We ought to treat others as we want to be treated in:

1. Judging – Matt. 7:1-2 We wouldn't want folks judging us. Don't judge.

2. Matt. 5:21-22 We wouldn't want someone to murder us; nor would we want someone to be angry with us without a cause. So, we are to treat others as we want to be treated.

3. Matt. 5:27-28 We wouldn't want someone to look at our mate with lust in their hearts for them or to violate the sanctity of our marriage, so we should not look with lust at another's mate and seek to violate their marriage.

4. Matt. 5:37 We would not want folks lying to us; so, we should not lie to them.

Let me mention two areas where we need to apply the Golden Rule:

A. In Our Conversation

Our words to others should never be sharp or unkind. Someone said, “Make sure your words are tender. You may have to eat them.”

-Someone else said, “The person with a sharp tongue usually cuts his own throat.”

-Will Rogers said, “Everybody likes to hear gossip, unless it's about them.”

B. In Your Treatment of Others

An elderly man had to go live with his son and daughter – in – law and young grandson. The daughter -in-law didn't want the elderly man living there and did everything she could to make life miserable for him. He was weak and shaky. One night, when he was trying to feed himself, he dropped a bowl of food and it went all over the table. In anger the daughter -in -law got up, put a wooden bowl in front of him, took away his fork and spoon and said, “If you're going to act like a pig, you can eat out of a trough like a pig” and dumped some food in the wooden bowl. Later that night the dad found his son in the back yard, whittling on some wood. He asked his son what he was making. The little boy replied, “Oh, I'm making a bowl to feed you and mommy in when you get old like granddaddy.”

The Golden Rule is not just a wise saying, it must be a regular practice. God's word makes the greatest impact on others when it is seen in our lives. In fact, the Gold Rule has to be seen to be believed.

A young lady was going to be married. She was shopping for fabric in order to make her wedding dress. She asked the owner for a very unusual type of fabric, the kind that would make the most noise when she walked. She wanted fabric that would rustle and make as much noise as possible. The owner found two bolts of material that would meet the request, but was puzzled at the lady's motives for such material. Finally she just asked, “Why would anyone want several yards of noisy material for a wedding dress?” Her answer revealed her expression of love she had for her young man. “You see,” she said, “my fiance is blind, so when I walk down the aisle, I want him to know when I've arrived at the alter so he won't be embarrassed.” Love found a way to express it self to meet the need.

It's nice to know God's Word. It's even better to practice it!

III. The Manner of the Golden Rule

The Golden Rule lived out in our lives is a demonstration of the Grace of God in our lives as Christ lives through us to others. Grace creates excellence in our lifestyle so that others are drawn to Jesus Christ. We can sum up the Golden Rule as giving grace to others in the name of Jesus.

A young teacher volunteered to teach at an inner-city grade school. She wanted to make an impact on the lives of underprivileged children. After only one month she was disappointed because she felt that she had failed. She was thinking about leaving because she was sure she was having no influence in the lives of those kids. At Thanksgiving, she asked the children to draw pictures of the things they were thankful for. Most of them drew pictures of Pilgrims and turkeys and tables of food. But she was puzzled by what one boy had drawn. It was a drawing of a hand. The child who did the drawing was small for his age and very shy. The other kids made fun of him on the playground and it was not uncommon for the teacher to have to go over and help him up when he had been knocked down. As the other children left school that day, she asked this boy to stay for a moment. She asked him what the drawing represented. “That is your hand, Ma'am. I'm thankful for your hand. Your hand is always there to lift me up when I get knocked

down.”

God has no hands but **our** hands to do His work today;

God has no feet but **our** feet to lead others in His way:

God has no voice but **our** voice to tell others how He died;

and **God** has no help but **our** help to lead them to His side.

The Road to Heaven Matthew 7:13-14

The Lord Jesus was a Master Preacher. When He came to the end of His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus did something important: He gave an invitation. He asked His listeners to make a decision or a response to the message they had just heard.

-It isn't enough to be enamored with Christ's ideas or to walk away in nodding agreement with what Jesus has said. There is a decision to be made; a response to be made.

-Jesus didn't want people to be entertained; He wanted them to make a decision.

Jesus comes to the end of His Sermon and says that there are only two choices we can make. There is no middle ground. We cannot straddle the fence when it comes to Jesus. We are either saved or lost. We are either saints or aint's .

-Jesus makes it crystal clear that there is no such thing as middle - of - the - road Christianity. We are on the Lord's side or we are on the side of Satan.

-Too many want to be Christians as long as it isn't inconvenient or if it doesn't take too much time or energy or commitment.

Most folks in our world today believe that all roads lead to God, and eventually we're all going to wind up in the same place. Jesus says that there are only TWO ROADS OR PATHS. One road leads to Destruction and the other road leads to Life.

-Where you and I wind up depends on which road we take. In other words, you cannot go south from here and expect to go to New York City. You cannot go east from here and wind up in Texas. Just as this is true in the physical realm, it is also true in the spiritual realm.

-Where you wind up in eternity will be determined by the road you take here on earth. It is impossible to take the wrong road and go to Heaven, and it is impossible to take the heavenly road and go to Hell.

What you do while in this world will determine forever where you spend your forever.

The fact that we will not live forever on this earth is a common theme throughout the bible – James 4:14; Job 14:1; Ps. 90:10; Heb. 9:27

-So since we are going to leave this world some day soon, and when we do, we will continue to live either in Heaven or Hell forever, it is essential that we know where we will end up.

I. There are Two Possible Directions in Life

Jesus says that there are only two possible roads in which we can walk. Jesus limits the choices to just two.

God has always confronted men with those two inevitable choices. Jer. 21:8; Joshua 24:15; Deut. 30:15, 19. This is the choices with which Jesus is confronting men in this passage.

A. There is a Broad way

The word “broad” means “spacious”. The broad way is wide open. Anything goes on the broad way. You can do anything you like, you can live like you want to live, you can call all the shots and make all the rules. You can carry all the baggage of your sin on this road. You can be king of the road on the broad way. You can be your own person and not have to answer to anyone. It's an easy way to live, because there is no one to please but yourself.

-The broad way is easy, broad, comfortable, popular; even logical. It is the path of least resistance. You don't have to humble yourself, repent of your sins or seek forgiveness. And there are plenty companions on this road. The crowd is large.

-The road to hell is easy. One doesn't have to be a smut peddler, a dope addict, or a drunk. You don't have to be a thief or liar. You can be a nice, decent, moral person and feel the traits are enough to get you to heaven. You can even go to church, give your money, enjoy the fellowship and be on the broad road.

The broad way has room for everyone except the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word. They are not welcome because of the changed life they would demand.

-By the way, it is the nice, church-going folks that have never received Jesus as Savior that causes Christ and His Church the greatest harm and does Satan the most good. How many times have I heard lost people say something like, "Well, why should I accept Jesus as my Savior? The folks at the church are just like me. Oh, they act religious on Sunday, but they're just like me the rest of the week. They curse just like me; they drink just like me, their family is messed up just like mine. They lie just like me." They pick out a few hypocrites and bunch all church folks together and think all so-called Christians are the same.

-"They're praising Jesus on Sunday, but they'll be alright on Monday, it's just a little religious game they play."

But there is a dark, sinister side to the broad way. There are some things you need to know before you decide to live out the rest of your life traveling the broad way.

1. You are not really in control. You are nothing more than a pawn of the devil. Eph. 2:1-3; Proverbs 14:12

2. Sin brings with it pain and sorrow. Proverbs 13:15: "The way of the transgressor is hard." Men fight their way to hell. There is the continual warfare with conscience; the absence of peace; the sting of sin; the certainty of destruction; the abandonment of God; then the paymaster will pay his well-earned wages of eternal death.

3. God offers a better alternative: things like peace, joy, and assurance of salvation.

B. There is a narrow way.

The word "narrow" means "hard, difficult to be entered." The narrow way is exactly the opposite of the broad way. It is a constricted way. On the narrow way, you must choose to give up your rights. You can no longer do as you please, but you must do those things that please the Lord. You cannot make the rules, but you are expected to keep the Lord's rules.

-When you walk the narrow way, you should expect some difficulty. After all, these fleshly bodies will resist the confines of the narrow way.

-The narrow way is hard, unpopular, and restrictive. On the narrow way you must leave much behind: selfishness, questionable practices, wrong attitudes, and sinful lust.

When we accept Christ as Savior and Lord, we don't just accept Him, we accept His way of life and what he stands for and wants from us.

-The boundaries of the narrow way are clearly marked by divine revelation, which restricts us to the confines of His Word and Will.

A few years ago a young African Christian died, martyred for the cause of Christ. He had chosen the narrow way, and it cost him his life. But before dying, he penned these words: "I am a part of the fellowship of the unashamed. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, and my future is secure. I am finished and done with low living, sight walking, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, worldly talking, cheap living, and warped goals. My face is set, my gate is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions are few, my guide is reliable, my mission is clear. I won't give up, shut up, let up, until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, for the cause of Jesus Christ. I must go till He comes, give till I drop, preach till everyone knows, work till He stops me. And when He comes for His own, He will have no trouble recognizing me, because my banner will have been clear."

-Compare that with the Christianity we see around us today. Too many believers are looking for the cheap way, the easy way, or the lazy way to serve God. But Jesus said disciplined is the way. It won't be easy.

II. There are Two Possible Destinations in Eternity

All roads end somewhere. The broad way leads to destruction. The narrow way leads to life. The broad way leads to hell. The narrow way leads to heaven.

A. There is a Place called Hell

The word "destruction" does not mean "annihilation" or "forever done away with." The word refers to the loss one suffers in the fires

of Hell. Every person on the broad way will eventually find themselves in the fires of Hell.

The Bible gives us a little insight into the place called Hell. It is a place of unquenchable fire (Mark 9:43; Luke 16:24), memory and remorse (Luke 16:25, 27-28), unsatisfied thirst (Luke 16:24-25), anger and frustration (Luke 13:28; Matt. 24:51), unspeakable pain and misery (Luke 16:24-26), Eternal separation from the presence of God (2Thess. 1:9), and undiluted wrath, no mercy. Outer Darkness.

-Regardless of what men think, Hell is real and every lost man will be bound hand and foot and cast into the fire from which there is no deliverance.

B. There is a Place called Heaven

The narrow road leads to Heaven above. Jesus promised that those who choose the narrow road would be with Him in a place of joy, rest, peace, unspeakable beauty and glory.

-The Bible says that in Heaven there will be no tears, pain, sorrow, or death. There will be no sin, no night, no curse. We will be with Jesus in a glorious city.

There are Two Possible Decisions you can make.

A. You can choose the wide gate

In reality, there is no real choice made in entering the wide gate. When a person is born into this world they are born in sin. As a result, they are already on the broad road. Yet, that little baby knows nothing of sin or of the choice to follow sin. But as the child grows, there comes a time when he knows right from wrong. We call this time reaching the age of accountability. At that time the child makes a conscious decision to either do evil or to do good. When that decision is made, the wide gate has been entered and the broad way becomes the course of life.

The one thing that Satan does is to try to keep men focused on the present rather than the future. He wants you to think of the Here and not the Hereafter.

- Haggai 1:5,7 says to “consider your ways”. Consider how you are living your life. How is the way you are living your life working for you? Sin brings misery, pain, suffering, loss, guilt, hardship. Think about the life you're living. You don't get a do-over if you stay on the broad way.
- Deut. 32:29 says to “consider your latter end.” You will spend eternity where you decide to spend eternity. Don't forget this: **Destiny is Determined By The Decision You Make!**

Listen to Jesus: Many! Many! Many more will spend eternity in Hell than will ever be in Heaven. Not because that's the way Jesus wants it. “It is not the Lord's will that ANY should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

B. You can choose the Narrow Gate

Few – in comparison to those on the wide road – will choose to follow the Narrow Road.

-Jesus said that “whosoever will may come”

1. Entering the Narrow Gate is a Difficult Experience

It's hard for us to humble ourselves, admit our sins, repent of our sins, turn from our sins, leave our sins and sinful lifestyle behind, and bow down before Him.

-Of course, God has made it as easy as possible for us. He has already paid the penalty for our sins. All we have to do is ask His forgiveness and approach Him in humility. But few seem willing to take that step. It's hard for many people to admit they are wrong and turn from the broad way.

2. Entering the Narrow Gate is a Definite Experience

The word “enter” demands a definite and specific action. The command is not to admire the gate or to think about entering the gate, but to enter it.

-Many people respect and praise Jesus, but never receive Him as Savior and Lord. He's in their head, but not in their heart.

-You will never go through the gate by accident or by being unaware of it. You must enter in decisively, thoughtfully, and purposely.

3. Entering the Narrow Gate is a Defining Experience

If you want to go to Heaven, you'll have to go God's way. He alone died for our sins and He alone can make us right before God. Acts 4:12; John 14:6

-People on the broad way assume our joy and peace and life in Christ is phony or manufactured. A person can never understand it until they have entered the narrow gate and experienced it for themselves.

Beware of the Wolves Matthew 7:15-20

When I pastored in Jackson, I went by to visit one of my members who had been sick. He lived in one of the rough sections of the city in south Jackson. When I went to the door there was a large, professional looking sign on the door that read: "Beware of the snake." When the member came to the door I asked him about the sign and he laughed and said, "I don't really have a snake. This is a rough neighborhood and most of the houses around here have been broken into and things stolen, but so far the sign has kept the thieves away."

When you see a "Beware of Dog" sign in a yard, you become cautious, looking for the potentially dangerous dog. Suppose the sign in the yard read, "Beware the wolf," you would really be careful, wouldn't you?

Wolves are some of the most fierce animals on earth and were dreaded by the shepherds in Jesus' day even more than a lion or a bear. Wolves are tireless and persistent. Once a wolf gets a taste of blood, he goes on a feeding frenzy, killing more than he could ever devour.

-Though wolves usually hunt for weak prey, they are very strong. A wolf can bite clean through the back leg of a horse with one snap. A German Shepherd exerts 750 pounds of pressure per square inch. A wolf can exert 1,500 pounds of pressure per square inch.

Jesus has just told us about the strait gate on the narrow way that leads to life. He has warned us about the broad way that leads to destruction. Now He proceeds to warn us of the messengers of the broad way. He describes them as wolves in sheep's clothing. He now tells us how to detect a false prophet or teacher.

A recent newspaper poll suggested that 87% of Americans expects to wind up in Heaven. But many who talk about Heaven don't live out the principles of Heaven. Jesus said that at the end times, false Christ and false prophets would arise and deceive even the elect, if possible. Again, here is the deceptive nature of Satan.

-One of the ways Satan tries to defeat the church is through infiltration.

-2 Cor. 11:13-14 Satan infiltrates the church through false prophets. False prophets are more than wrong; they are Dangerous, Deceptive, Divisive, and Destructive.

Three things I want you to see about these false prophets:

I. The Fleece They Wear – Mt 7:15

The word "Beware" means "to be on guard, be alert, pay close attention to". It is like a school teacher who says, "Sit up straight and pay attention!" Beware because there is great danger present which will bring much harm to you if you are not cautious.

Beware of false prophets because they present themselves in sheep's clothing, but are really wolves. They are not what they claim to be. False prophets are wolves in character, but they like to hide under the disguise of sheep's clothing and portray themselves as sheep. False prophets wore the garments of the true prophet in order to deceive the people of God. They wore a prophet's garment, but lived anything but a prophet's life.

How can we spot a wolf?

1. We can spot a wolf by *his* creed. - 1 John 4:1-3

We are to be like the Bereans. They heard Paul preach and "received the word with all readiness" and then went home and "searched the scriptures" to see if what Paul taught was so. The Bible is the standard we must go by. If the teaching doesn't align with scripture, we ought to reject it.

2. We can spot a wolf by *his character*.

Our beliefs determine our behavior. None of us are perfect, but when a pastor starts living in a way that openly denies the Word of God, he has disqualified himself for ministry.

-The Bible takes the responsibility of teaching very seriously. James 3:1 says that teachers are held to a higher standard, for they must live what they believe.

-I Tim. 3:1-7 says that a church should not call a “novice” or a new convert as pastor.

Jude 11 says that false teachers:

a. Pervert the Gospel: “the way of Cain”

Adam and Eve had two sons: Cain and Able. Able was a shepherd; Cain was a farmer. Both came to worship God: Able with a lamb, had faith in the blood; Cain came with the fruit of the ground, the works of his own hands. Cain would blur the way of salvation. There is only one way to salvation: Jesus! Acts 4:12; John 14:6. The false teacher would make the narrow way broad. He does not see Jesus as the ONLY way of salvation.

-Our world wants to hear a feel-good message: one that doesn't offend anyone by showing them that they are a sinner. They want to hear anything – goes gospel. Don't get specific about personal sin or personal responsibility for sin.

-Chuck Swindoll tells of a man who was saved who had been going to a church that preached only a feel-good message. After he was saved, he told Swindoll, “They are good loving people at that church, but those folks would have loved me right into hell!”

b. Prostitute the Gospel: “The error of Balaam”

Balaam was offered money by a pagan king to put a curse on Israel. He told the king that he could not do so until the king offered him a king's ransom. He told the king that Israel would bring a curse upon themselves if the women of Moab flirted with the men of Israel and God's wrath would be upon His adulterous people. It led to the slaughter of 24,000 Israelites.

-Balaam trimmed the message of God for personal gain and because he wanted to be popular with the people.

c. Protest the Gospel: As Korah rebelled against God's man and God's Word because it was opposite to their way of thinking.

In our day it takes this form: Whatever is of God, they stand against. It may be the Ten Commandments, prayer in schools for our children, or a call to morality.

-False prophets are seen not only for what they say, but for what they fail to say in taking their stand for the things of God.

II. The Fruit They Bear – Mt 7:16-20

You can tell a false prophet, not just by what he preaches, but what he produces. In fact, the greatest test for the false prophet is not what he says, but the fruit he produces in his life. The false prophets cannot continue to cover his deception, because the real fruit of his life will come out. Root determines the fruit. Role playing doesn't produce spiritual results, only the Spirit of God can produce real spiritual fruit in our lives.

The fruit of the tree will help us identify the tree. Fruit reveals a tree. One may misjudge what a tree is by looking at its leaves, branches, blooms or other features other than the fruit, but the fruit is proof – positive of the identification of the tree. If the tree has apples, you know that it is an apple tree and not a plum tree, orange tree, walnut tree or a peach tree.

There are a number of reasons why a Christian must be known for his fruit:

A. Fruit is the *mark of Genuine Faith*.

In other words, if we are really Christians, there will be some evidence in our lives. The Holy Spirit will live inside us and give us a divine nature that must be reflected in some way – John 15:1-5

B. Fruit is the *measure of our Walk with God*

Notice that Jesus spoke of various levels of fruit-bearing: Fruit, more fruit, much fruit. Not every believer is going to be as fruitful as others, but the more we abide in Christ, the more fruitful we become.

C. Fruit is the *motivation behind God's Discipline*

Jesus said that every branch that bears fruit will get pruned so that it might bear more fruit. In other words, discipline and difficult times are the means God uses to prune us and help us grow. Before God can greatly use a man, He has to greatly crush him.

D. Fruit is the *method for Touching Other People*

God doesn't want me to be fruitful for my own sake, but so that I can be a blessing to others. When we go to church and learn to be fruitful, it is so that we can touch other people with the love of God, not just so we can learn more.

E. Fruit is a *means of Glorifying the Father*— John 15:8

What is fruit? Our character: who we are; Our conduct: what we do; Our contributions: what we give; Our communication: what we say; Converts: who we win.

III. The Fate They Bear – Mt 7:19

Just as bad trees are cut down and burned, such is the destiny of false teachers or anyone who does not

know Jesus Christ as their Savior. The punishment of false teachers is severe because their damage is severe. They portray themselves to be friends, but they in essence are enemies of men's souls.

-The person who does not warn you of the consequences of sin, but instead, comforts you in your sin, is not your friend.

Jesus is actually extending His hand of grace to those who don't know Jesus. His warning is to those who have the Appearance of being Christians, but who have not had the Experience of trusting Christ. We need to hear and heed God's warnings. You may proclaim to be a Christian and even act like a Christian most of the time, but you do not possess Christ in your heart. We will stand before Him some day. He will reveal who is the professor and who is the possessor of the Lord Jesus.

Professors or Possessors? Matthew 7:21-23

These are some of the saddest, most solemn and most searching words to be found in the *entire Word of God*. Jesus is talking about being self-deceived; of folks thinking they are saved, when in reality, they are not.

-Jesus has just talked about false prophets or wolves in sheep's clothing. Now He talks about those who make a false profession of faith.

-He has just talked about being deceived **BY OTHERS**; Now He talks about being deceived by a more persuasive person – yourself.

-Self – deception is a serious problem because it eventually condemns men to hell.

Jesus is not talking about those in cults; not people who are intentional hypocrites; nor those who out – and – out deny Christ. He is talking about religious folks; folks who are convinced they are on the road to Heaven when they are really on the road to Hell.

-Some will even address Jesus as “Lord”, which was a common Jewish substitute title for Jehovah. Therefore to address Jesus as “Lord, Lord,” was to publicly add a spirit of intense zeal to demonstrate their strength of devotion and dedication to the Lord.

We must profess Christ as “Lord” if we are to be saved. To claim “I will trust Him as Savior, but not as my Lord” would be an indication of the insincerity of our decision. He must be Lord! Romans 10:9

Rom 10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

The problem of this profession in Matthew 7:21 is the lack of genuine sincerity. This profession about the Lord Jesus Christ was nothing but empty words. Matt. 15:8

Mat 15:8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me.

Listen again to the warning of Jesus: “Not every one that says to me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven.” There will be some surprises in heaven at judgment time – 2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Peter 1:10; Matthew 15:8.

2Co 13:5 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

2Pe 1:10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:

Mat 15:8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me.

-John Newton, author of the song "Amazing Grace" said, "If I ever reach Heaven I expect to find three wonders (or surprises) there: first, to meet some I had no thought to see there; second, to miss some I had thought to meet there; and third, the greatest wonder of all, to find myself there."

If there is anything that you and I need to be certain about, we need to be certain about our Soul's Salvation. Don't assume just because someone says, "Lord, Lord," that that person will be in Heaven.

Let me tell you a true story that happened in California. There was an elderly lady in her 70s who went to the grocery store to shop. When she walked outside she found four unknown males in her car. Well, this was a pretty tough old grandma. She dropped her shopping bags, reached into her purse, pulled out a 38 Smith & Wesson, ran up to the door, got in a policeman's pose, pointing that gun at them and screamed at the top of her voice, "I know how to use this gun and I'll use it if I have to. Now get out of this car!"

Well, these four men didn't say one word. Those doors popped open in a millisecond, and they ran like mad. Before you could say "scat"! Those men were gone. Well, the lady put her gun back in her purse, and picked up her shopping bags; went to bring them into the back seat of the car and got into the driver's seat. But there was one problem. Her key would not fit the ignition. The reason why it would not fit is because this was not her car. Her car was identical to this car, but it was parked five speaces further down. Well, she reloaded her bags into her car and decided she had better drive to the police station.

Well, the sergeant that she told the story to nearly collapsed in laughter when he pointed to the other end of the counter where four pale white males were reporting a carjacking by an elderly white woman.

Don't assume that just because someone joins the church or is baptized or teaches Sunday School or sings in the choir or preaches behind a pulpit, don't assume they are saved - "for many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord"... but I will say to them, "I never knew you."

-I Cor. 12:3 "No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit." Only when the Holy Spirit dwells in your heart can you truly say, "Jesus is Lord of my life." 2 Tim. 2:19 "The Lord knows those who are His."

Notice Mt 7:21b "but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

-The evidence of salvation will be seen in CONDUCT as well as CONFESSION. The condition for going to Heaven is doing the will of God. There is only one way in which a man's sincerity can be proved, and that is by the practice of his life. There is only one proof of love, and that proof is obedience. There is no point in saying that we love a person, and then do things that break that person's heart.

So often folks confess God with their lips and then deny Him with their lives.

-So what is "doing the will of God"? It is profound heart – obedience that is not only on the surface, but permeates our entire inner being.

Eph. 6:6 God's will for us involves Profession, Production, and Performance.

Eph 6:6 Not with eyeservice, as men pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart;

Several things are suggested in this passage:

I. An Appointment

The setting of these verses is the judgment, when every person will stand before the Lord to give an accounting of himself.

-Heb. 9:27 "It is appointed – ordained, reserved- unto man, once to die, and after this the judgment."

The expression "face the music" is said to have originated in Japan. According to the story, one man in the imperial orchestra couldn't play a note. Being a man of great influence and wealth, he had demanded that he be given a place in the group because he wanted to "perform" before the Emperor. The conductor agreed to let him sit in the second row of the orchestra, even though he couldn't read music. He was given a flute, and when a concert would begin, he'd raise his instrument, pucker his lips, and move his fingers. He would go through all the motions of playing, but he never made a sound. This deception continued for two years.

Then a new conductor took over. He told the orchestra that he wanted to audition each player personally. One by one they

performed in his presence. Then came the flutist's turn. He was frantic with worry, so he pretended to be sick. However, the doctor who was ordered to examine him declared that he was perfectly well. The conductor insisted that the man appear and demonstrate his skill. Shamefacedly, he had to confess that he was a fake. He was unable to face the music.

-In the spiritual realm, many professing believer goes through the motions, but they are only pretenders. Someday, they will be called upon to stand before the Judge of Heaven and earth and their deception will be revealed. No one will be able to hide in the crowd. Many will face the music one day when they stand before the Lord.

-Every person must face God – no exceptions; no escapes; no exemptions. You and I will stand before Him.

One of America's best – known theologians tells the story of how he was talking to his five – year-old son, and he asked him two questions. First of all, he said, "Are you sure that when you die you will go to heaven?" The little boy said, "Yes, Daddy, I am." He then asked him the second question. "If you were to die tonight and God said to you, "Why should I let you into my Heaven?" What would you answer?" His little boy didn't hesitate. He said immediately, "Because I'm dead."

Well, all of us are going to be dead if Jesus tarries. Just because you've died doesn't mean you are going to Heaven, unless you know the Lord personally.

II. The Astonishment – Mt 7:22-23

The word "many" indicates that the crowd of false professors will be a large crowd. "Many" will be guilty of false profession. There will be surprises in Heaven at judgment time.

Notice what these folks say to Jesus as they stand before Him. They address Jesus as "Lord, Lord." That is a polite and courteous way of addressing Him, but Jesus was not their Lord on earth.

-But when Jesus said in 7:23 that He "never knew" them, they became defensive and argued with Him about their salvation. They believed they DESERVED to go to Heaven, but that was part of the problem. No one deserves to go to heaven, but because of His grace and mercy we have eternal life. They think so highly of themselves as to argue with Christ the Judge about their merits.

-Notice how confident they are! They flatter themselves that they should be saved because of their Performances. They are firmly convinced that Heaven is theirs. They complain to the Judge when He says "depart from me" because they are convinced the Judge is unfair. They are ignorant of their own spiritual condition.

They even give what they thought was evidence of their salvation:

1.Their words

We have prophesied or preached. Is it possible for a man to preach the Gospel and still be unsaved?

That's what Jesus said. In my own ministry I have seen two men who were preachers who were later saved.

2.Their works

They claimed to have cast out demons and done many wonderful or powerful works; mighty miracles. And I think of Judas who cast out demons, but he was not redeemed.

3.Their warrant

"In Thy Name" Three times they say that they ministered "in thy name." All these things, as good as they were, did not save them.

III. The Announcement - Mt 7:23

Not every one that calls me Lord, Lord shall enter the kingdom of heaven...depart from me YOU THAT WORK INIQUITY, I never knew you.

Notice the word "profess." It indicates an open announcement of doom of those who are guilty of a false profession.

-What humiliation will take place at the judgment. Sinners who have walked in the praise and honor

of men shall have their doom, their guilt, and their sin publicly announced and declared. They will be told of their sins and others will hear their doom.

"Depart from me! Go Away!" They rejected God, Now, God rejects them. What a terrible thing to be rejected by God. What a terrible thing to have God say He doesn't want you in His presence. But the unsaved have no grounds for complaint, for in rejecting Christ as their Savior and Lord, they have said they do not want God in their presence. They will get what they want for eternity.

Notice that God labels all their mighty deeds as iniquity. When a person is not saved, he is seen by God in all his sinfulness. God sees the heart, and if the blood of Jesus has not cleansed the heart, what He sees will be nothing but iniquity.

IV. The Anguish – Mt 7:23

Jesus is a loving, merciful, compassionate Judge. He will have no delight or pleasure in saying to anyone, “Depart from me. I never knew you.” It will break His heart to see one person bound hand and foot and cast into the Lake of Fire. There, in outer darkness, will be constant torment, screaming, pain, pleading for relief, but none will come.

-Ezekiel 18:30-32

Eze 18:30 Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn *yourselves* from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.

Eze 18:31 Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

Eze 18:32 For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn *yourselves*, and live ye.

Building On the Rock Matthew 7:24-29

These verses bring us to the end of what we call The Sermon on the Mount. The last two verses of Matthew 7 records the reaction of those who heard the sermon.

-When the congregation broke up and went away in twos and threes, the people were amazed and astonished and said to one another: “This preacher is different. I never heard anybody just like Him before. There is a ring of authority and certainty in His voice and it's refreshing. He seems to have first-hand knowledge about the things He spoke about. He made things come alive for us and personalized everything for us.”

Jesus made it clear that His message was not just for hearing or just for entertainment or just for enjoyment; it was for doing. James picked up on what Jesus said by saying, “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own self.” The word “deceiving” here does not carry the usual meaning of “deceiving.” Rather, this word is used in mathematics to refer to miscalculation. Professing Christians who are content with only hearing the word and not doing the word have made a serious spiritual miscalculation.

Jesus deals with two things in these last verses: Building and Battering.

I. The Builders

The builders are divided into two classes: The wise builders and the foolish builders.

A. The Wise Builder – Mt 7:24-25

Jesus is not talking about building a literal house. Rather, He is talking about building a man's character; his soul-home.

-Nothing is more important in building than the foundation. The wise man builds his life, his character, on the solid Rock Foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ – 1 Cor. 3:11-15

1Co 3:11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1Co 3:12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

1Co 3:13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

1Co 3:14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

1Co 3:15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

-Luke's account of the Sermon on the Mount is found in Luke 6. Luke adds something about the building of the wise man's house that Matthew doesn't record. Luke 6:48 says that the wise man “digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock.” He went deep into the foundation of obedience, commitment, the Word of God, and fellowship with God.

We are building all the time, whether wisely or foolishly. We are building by everything we do; by everything we see or watch and feast our eyes upon; by everything we read; by everything we hear; by everything we think; by everything we speak; by every picture that hangs on the wall of our imagination; by every ambition that we cherish.

-What we are today depends on what materials we used to build with yesterday. What we will be tomorrow will depend on the materials we use today. The materials we use to build our character makes all the difference in the world.

Use fine, beautiful material to build your soul – home!

- The widow put fine material in her building when she threw in her two miles for love's sake.
- Daniel used fine material when he purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself.
- Joseph used fine material when he fled his temptation, even though his escape cost him the horrors of a dungeon.
- Other fine materials include loyalty, truthfulness, humility, and submission to the will of God.

Could I remind you that the roads of life have forks in them every day. Every day there are decisions to make and choices to make.

-Could I also remind you that you are an influence in someone's life,so make wise choices.

B. The Foolish Builder – Mt 7:26-27

The foolish man built upon the sand. There was no depth to his foundation. He used some shoddy stuff in his building.

1.The Sands of Shortcut Living

He didn't dig down deeply to the rock for a foundation. It was a shallow foundation. The construction of his house went much faster than that of the wise man.

-Sin has many shortcuts for men. The flesh wants everything right now and doesn't want to wait for

God's best. Sin says get rich now and tells you to gamble or steal to get rich quickly. Sin says you can have sex now instead of waiting for marriage, so immorality becomes a lifestyle for many.

2.The Sands of Shunning God

When you shut the Lord out of your life, you are heading for a crash, no matter who you are. When you shut the Lord out, you shut out His strength, wisdom, love, peace, goodness and blessing. You shut out all things necessary to build a stable life.

3.The Sands of Spurning your parents

Prov. 15:5 "A fool despiseth his father's instruction" The word "despiseth" means "to hold in contempt of to count as worthless."

-Time and again God stresses honoring your parents. If you do not do so it will weaken you instead of strengthening you.

4.The Sands of Stubbornness

Poor material are things like thoughtless profanity, dirty jokes, speaking when you should be silent and being silent when you should speak, spending time with the wrong crowd.

II. The Battering

The house you build is going to be tested. During the sunny days there seems to be little difference between the two houses. They probably looked the same.

-Then suddenly, rain, wind, waves. In the Bible storms, winds, floods, all speak of trouble and hardships. There will be times of testing in everybody's life.

Did you notice that the same storm came to both houses? God does not cuddle His Saints. He does not protect them from the stress and strain of life. He never promises them exemption from conflict.

-But He does promise to never leave us or forsake us in the storm. He said, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one."

Adrian Rogers used to say that the person who has a Bible that's falling apart has a life that isn't. It makes all the difference in the

world when God is with you in the midst of the storm.

How do storms come in our life?

1.Through Temptation: Temptations will come but He will always give us a way of escape.

2.Through Bitter Loss: When storms come, are you able to say with Job, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord"?

3.Through Death: Years ago a pastor, who was a humble old saint, went to comfort a friend who had lost his wife. The friend didn't have much for God or the things of God. The Pastor told the bereaved man that if he would turn to God, He would be with him in his lose. The bereaved man turned on the Pastor bitterly and said, "Have you ever lost your wife?" The Preacher said, "No." "Well," said the man, "You don't know what you are talking about. Wait till you have a sorrow like mine and see if your Jesus can meet your needs." The preacher went away with a sense of failure. But the testing time was closer to him, too, than he had dreamed. Six months later his wife was killed in an accident. Her body was brought back to the church and this grief-stricken husband – Pastor stood by the coffin of his wife to speak. He said: "Some six months ago I tried to comfort a bereaved husband, but I failed. He said I did not know what I was talking about. Is he here?" And the man stood up. The preacher then continued: "My friend, I know today. I am in the midst of a sorrow like your sorrow, and I want to tell you that while my heart is broken, I find His grace sufficient. I find that His hand holds me and steadies me. I find that my skies are as bright as the promises of God, and that underneath are the Everlasting

Arms. Sir, build your life on the Rock of Ages."

Let me ask you two questions:

1.Is the foundation beneath your life absolutely solid? If you have built your life upon Jesus, the Solid Rock, it is. But if your life is not built upon Him, it is not.

2.Is the life you are building daily eternally reliable?

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But wholly lean on Jesus name.

On Christ the Solid Rock I stand All other ground is sinking sand.

All other ground is sinking sand.