

Sermon on the Mount: You have heard it said – Matthew 5:17-48

Sunday 25 October 2020

Before You Begin

Our hope is that this is a resource that will help us to engage meaningfully with God's word and invite us into a sense of worship, despite being unable to meet face-to-face. Use it in a way that feels comfortable and helpful to you.

A table of contents has been added to give you a sense of what will follow and allow you to move more easily through the worship elements.

Prepare

Have your Bible close by and some food and drink prepared for communion. It doesn't have to be bread and grape juice; it could be whatever is available (tea and a biscuit) to use in this symbolic time.

Get into a 'Sacred' Space

Be intentional. Sit somewhere. Have some visual representation of God (perhaps a small cross, your Bible, a symbol or image) or you might play some reflective music. Start with a few moments of silence and deep breathing.

Consider your environment

What will work for you in the space you have? If you have others in your house (housemates/family), consider sharing this time with them, each reading or participating as appropriate. You might simply reflect individually, in your own time and space. Afterwards, you might connect with others through technology to share your reflections, or an encouragement, with them.



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Call to Worship

Penny Martin

Welcome to our worship resources for this week – wherever you are, we hope you feel warmly encouraged and inspired by what has been thoughtfully prepared.

It has been excellent to have had a few more freedoms this past week since the minor easing of some restrictions. What have you done? Did anyone drive to the edge of their 25km radius? Did anyone get a chance to go walking somewhere you hadn't been able to for a while? Whatever the past week has meant for you, we want to encourage you to continue to pray towards the further safe easing of restrictions and press into a time when things can feel a bit more normal for many of us.

We are into the second week of our *Sermon on The Mount Series* and after an inspiring introduction from Kaye last week, we are blessed to be hearing from Paul Arnott this week as we delve more deeply into this transformative message from Jesus.

We pray that you are challenged, encouraged and inspired as you enter into this worship and teaching space and that you are resourced in your practise of faith for the week ahead.

Song: Good Good Father

I've heard a thousand stories
Of what they think You're like
But I've heard the tender whisper
Of love in the dead of night
You tell me that You're pleased
And that I'm never alone

You're a Good Good Father
It's who You are
It's who You are
It's who You are
And I'm loved by You
It's who I am
It's who I am
It's who I am

I've seen many searching for answers
Far and wide
But I know we're all searching for answers
Only You provide
Because You know just what we need
Before we say a word

You are perfect in all of Your ways
You are perfect in all of Your ways
You are perfect in all of Your ways to us

Love so undeniable I can hardly speak
Peace so unexplainable I can hardly think
As You call me deeper still
As You call me deeper still
As You call me deeper still
Into love love love

CCLI Song # 7036612

Anthony Brown | Pat Barrett

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Book: The Good Samaritan

Andrew McDonough



An expert in the Law of Moses stood up and asked Jesus a question to see what he would say. What must I do to have eternal life?

What is written in the Scriptures?

The Scriptures say, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind." They also say, "Love your neighbours as much as you love yourself."

You have given the right answer. If you do this, you will have eternal life.

But the man wanted to show that he knew what he was talking about. Who are my neighbours?

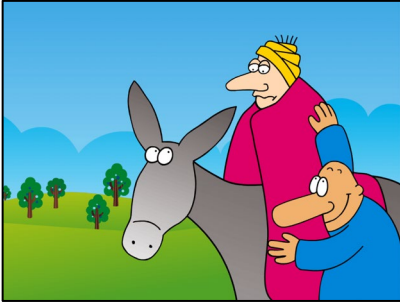
Jesus answered by telling this story.



As a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, robbers attacked him and grabbed everything he had. They beat him up and ran off, leaving him half dead.



A priest happened to be going down the same road. But when he saw the man, he walked past on the other side.



Later a temple helper came to the same place. But when he saw the man who had been beaten up, he also went past on the other side.

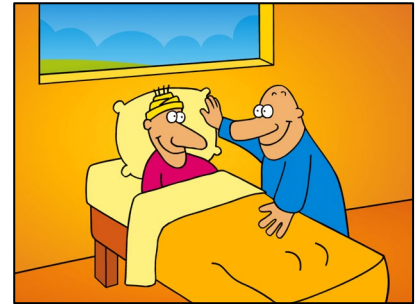
A man from Samaria then came travelling along that road. When he saw the man, he felt sorry for him and went over to him. He treated his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put him on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where

he took care of him.

The next morning he gave the innkeeper two silver coins and said, "Please take care of the man. If you spend more than this on him, I will pay you when I return."

Which of these three people was a real neighbour to the man who was beaten up by robbers?

The one who showed pity. "Go and do the same!"



Setting the Scene

Paul Arnott

The so-called Sermon on the Mount has a unique fascination. It presents the very heart of the teaching of Jesus and is the nearest thing to a manifesto he ever uttered. It's likely that Jesus went up into a mountain to teach to draw a parallel between Moses, who received the law at Mt Sinai, and himself. The Sermon on the Mount occurs only in the gospel of Matthew. The gospel of Luke contains a similar sermon, sometimes called The Sermon on the Plain, which is much shorter at only 30 verses. Many scholars have questioned whether the Sermon on the Mount was ever in any meaningful sense a sermon preached by Jesus on a particular occasion. Perhaps Matthew just collected together a number of Jesus's teachings and called them a sermon. At the end of the day it matters not whether it was one long sermon or a collection of Jesus' teachings. The teachings came from Jesus. The real issue is whether Jesus gave this teaching, especially the Beatitudes, as a lofty ideal to which his followers should aspire, but no one had any hope of attaining. John Stott says,

"To put Jesus's teaching in The Sermon on the Mount beyond anybody's reach is to ignore the purpose of Christ's sermon; to put them within everybody's reach is to ignore the reality of human sin. These teachings are attainable, but only by those who have experienced the new birth which Jesus told Nicodemus was the indispensable condition of seeing and entering God's kingdom."

(John R.W. Stott, *The Message of The Sermon on the Mount*, 1985).

Bible Reading: Matthew 5:17-24, 43-48 (The Message)

If you are with others perhaps take turns to read different sections

“Don’t suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures—either God’s Law or the Prophets. I’m not here to demolish but to complete. I am going to put it all together, pull it all together in a vast panorama. God’s Law is more real and lasting than the stars in the sky and the ground at your feet. Long after stars burn out and earth wears out, God’s Law will be alive and working.

“Trivialize even the smallest item in God’s Law and you will only have trivialized yourself. But take it seriously, show the way for others, and you will find honour in the kingdom. Unless you do far better than the Pharisees in the matters of right living, you won’t know the first thing about entering the kingdom.

“You’re familiar with the command to the ancients, ‘Do not murder.’ I’m telling you that anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder. Carelessly call a brother ‘idiot!’ and you just might find yourself hauled into court. Thoughtlessly yell ‘stupid!’ at a sister and you are on the brink of hellfire. The simple moral fact is that words kill.

“This is how I want you to conduct yourself in these matters. If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God.

“You’re familiar with the old written law, ‘Love your friend,’ and its unwritten companion, ‘Hate your enemy.’ I’m challenging that. I’m telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that.

“In a word, what I’m saying is, Grow up. You’re kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.”

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Message

Paul Arnott

The teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, especially his command, *"You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"* begs the question, "What's the goal of the Christian life?"

The religious leaders of Jesus's day believed that the goal of the religious life was to obey the Old Testament law. They followed a religion of rules and regulations, which they'd turned into an art form; an intricate ethical system built around the first five books of the Bible, the Torah. The Scribes and Pharisees had calculated that the Old Testament contained 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions. They taught that the only way to be right with God was through strict observance of the law. Having been brought up in a Christian home as part of the Hobart Baptist church I find myself wondering what my 15-year-old self would have seen as the goal of the Christian life. I suspect I may have felt that living as perfect a life as possible was the end goal.

When Jesus said in Matt 5.48, *"You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"* the Jewish leaders would have undoubtedly heard it as a call to obey the law. Jesus was almost certainly quoting from the book of Leviticus in which God commanded his people, *"You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy."* (Lev. 19:2) Theirs was a salvation of works, by which they tried to make themselves right with God by living a moral life. But what if, despite their very best efforts, they had it all wrong? The bottom line is that no matter how hard we try to live a morally perfect life we can't make ourselves right with God. If we could there would have been no need for Christ to die on the cross to deal with human sin, that tendency we've all inherited from our first parents, to go our own way instead of God's way.

Ultimately, being made right with God is all about grace. The apostle Paul tells the Christians in Ephesus that there's nothing they can do to earn forgiveness of sin, except to take hold of what Jesus won for them on the cross. He says, *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast."* (Eph. 2:8-9) Even the faith to trust in Christ is God's gift. Admittedly we need to exercise the faith we're given as disciples of Christ, but it is a gift, not something we've earned by living good lives.

So, at this point we could answer that the goal of the Christian life is to have sin forgiven, to enable us to be made right with God and go to heaven. End of story! Except it's not the end of the story. It's only the beginning. Having our sin forgiven and being in right relationship to God is just the start of the Christian journey.

But, didn't Jesus imply that the goal of the Christian life was, "to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect?" Yes, he did. But perhaps perfection is more than legal conformity to the law? Jesus says to anyone who would follow him in v.20: *"Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."* How can this be so? Because Christian righteousness goes deeper. It's an inward righteousness of mind and motive. It's a radical obedience. God's standard isn't moral perfection, but obedience in love.

In the rest of Matthew 5 Jesus gives a number of examples of how this greater righteousness works – six parallel paragraphs about murder, adultery, divorce, swearing oaths, revenge and love for enemies. He says, *“You’ve heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.”*

Jesus rejects the superficial interpretation of the law given by the Scribes and Pharisees by providing the true interpretation. His purpose is to reveal the full depth of its meaning. He fulfils the law by declaring the radical demands of the righteousness of God. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, *“Jesus, in fact, has nothing to add to the commandments of God, except this, that he keeps them.”* He does more than obey them himself; he explains what obedience will involve for everyone who follows him.

Jesus goes deeper than external conformity to the law. He points to the heart relationship, which God promised through the prophet Jeremiah, *“I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts”* (Jer. 31:33). And through Ezekiel, *“I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes”* (Ezek. 36:27). God’s promise to put both his law and his Spirit within us coincide in the person of Jesus, his teaching and his work on the cross.

God’s purpose for us is that we will have a heart and head relationship with him. In the gospel of John Jesus told the disciples, *“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.”* But he doesn’t stop there. He goes on to say, *“My Father will love whoever loves me and we will come to them and make our home with them.”* (John 14:23)

The goal of the Christian life is to make our home with the triune God and God will make a home with us. The goal of the Christian life is to know God, to be known by God and to make God known to others.

When Jesus tells the disciples in v.48 that they, “must be perfect, as their heavenly Father is perfect” the context makes it clear that he’s commanding his disciples to love their enemies, as well as their neighbours; to pray for those who persecute them. More broadly, the word “perfect” in the Greek isn’t just about moral perfection; it means, “completeness, wholeness, integration.” It speaks of maturity. If we’re mature followers of Jesus, we forgive those who hurt us. We turn the other cheek. We live a life that is totally integrated to the will of God, which reflects the character of God in Christ. Mature Christians exhibit love, compassion, understanding, insight and wisdom, as Jesus did.

Have you ever wondered how some Christians, despite having been followers of Jesus for many years, seem to lack maturity as human beings? The reason is that some of us have never grown up in some areas of our lives. As a child I got into the habit of telling myself I was stupid when I made a mistake. For example, if I dropped and broke something my reaction was to think, even say, angrily, “You idiot! You’re dumb.” I think I reacted like this so often I actually came to believe it was true. This was a habit I carried into adulthood and it was only when I became aware how it was affecting me, and others around me, that I made a decision to try to respond differently. Part of changing was realising that God didn’t see me as an idiot when I made a mistake, that in fact God

loves me, no matter how many mistakes I make. I can draw on the strength God offers me, by his Spirit, to respond maturely. This doesn't mean I don't sometimes still respond in the old way, but increasingly I'm able to exercise self-control.

All of us have areas of our lives in which we need to grow up. God wants us to be mature in Christ, to be integrated in him. As the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:20, "Don't be children in your thinking. But ... be mature." Be complete. Be whole.

Questions for reflection and discussion

In recent months we've been focussing on becoming more like Christ. So, this morning I leave us with two questions to ponder:

1. In what areas of my life does God want me to grow up?
2. How can I co-operate with God to allow him to help me to become more like Jesus?

Song: Breathe on me breath of God

Breathe on me breath of God
Fill me with life anew
That I may love what Thou dost love
And do what Thou wouldst do

Breathe on me breath of God
Until my heart is pure
Until with Thee I will one will
To do and to endure

Breathe on me breath of God
Till I am wholly Thine
Till all this earthly part of me
Glows with Thy fire divine

Breathe on me breath of God
So shall I never die
But live with Thee the perfect life
Of Thine eternity

CCLI Song # 99481
Edwin Hatch | Robert Jackson
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Communion

Harley Kitchen - Have some food and drink prepared for this time

If you're able, join us at 11am Sunday through Zoom to share in communion together at rngwd.com/communion or via Facebook live rngwd.com/fbv

If you are unable to join us, then please use the following reflection to take communion in your own way today and after, consider who you can call to have a chat as you would on a Sunday morning after a church service.

Good morning all. It's a privilege to lead Communion – the very heart of our worship.



As an introduction, I'd like to share a photo with you of "Mount Beatitudes" on the shore of the Sea of Galilee – the traditional place where Jesus sat down and taught the immortal truths of the Sermon on the Mount.

I took this photo of this hillside (on a rather dull day as you can see) in 2007. I think, of all the places we went in the Holy Land, this visit to the Sea of Galilee with its hillside and its stony shore was where I felt the presence of Jesus most acutely. (All the other holy places have had Churches built over them – this one is "as it was"!)

So maybe on this hillside, Jesus spoke these Beatitudes that really sum up in a new way the character of God – and the sort of life He calls us to. A new agreement, or covenant. You will remember the old one including the Ten Commandments, was an agreement between God and His people for obedience by them – and blessing by Him! Not much "heart, soul, feeling" in it.

Now, Jesus renews that covenant – and, as we have heard in today's message, takes us deeper into it – gives the Ten Commandments a whole new meaning – to do with our thoughts and motives, feelings and desires!

And so, as Jesus gave us Communion, His Supper, he offered his disciples the cup, and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20). The new covenant. New agreement between God and us humans, made by the sacrifice of his life, bringing to an end the need for the sacrifices of animals at the Temple to pay for human sin.

And bringing in a heart relationship – a walk by faith in God's goodness, and in His power in this world to change things.

We read in Luke 22, "Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

So, as we prepare to take the bread and cup this morning in our homes, let us commune together with our loving God, in prayer. Would you pray with me ...

Prayer

Harley Kitchen

Almighty God, Maker of heaven and earth, we come in praise and thanks to you this morning for your great love for us. Thank you that over the centuries you have kept on calling us into relationship with Yourself. You haven't given up on us humans in our weakness and sinfulness. And as we take this bread and cup this morning, we thank you that through the self-giving death of Christ we have your forgiveness – and through his resurrection we have Your life within us that motivates us into working together with you in this needy world. Draw near to each of us this morning, as we recognise we eat and drink together in unity – which we do, with our thanksgiving. Amen

Connect cards online

Click this link or enter it into your web browser rngwd.com/connect.

We love to know that you have been able to connect through worship today. Please click on the link (or enter it into your web browser) to our online connect cards letting us know which ways you have been able to worship, and if you want to let us know how we can praying with you.

Thank you!