

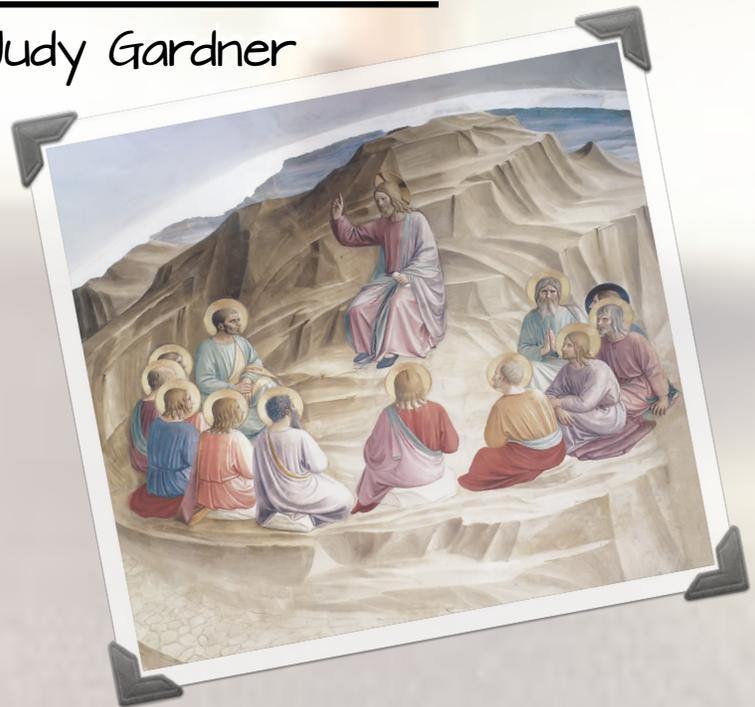
February 6-10, 2023 Edition

Following  
The Year<sup>(s)</sup> Of <sup>^</sup>Jesus Part 58

Overview Of First Third  
Of The Sermon On The Mount

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

\*\*\* These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;o) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

\*\*\*\* Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside](http://www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside)). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other

**Monday Reflection:** First off I want to thank all of you for being so patient with me the last few months. Dealing with my own health conditions as well as Judy's has been a high adventure ordeal at times and it has taken me away from Riverside's weekend services more often than I even want to contemplate. I always miss you guys when I'm gone and it has not been easy being away so much lately. Judy and I are both home in Alaska now and I have hope that things are looking up for both of us as we leave a really crummy January (for us at least) and head into what I believe will be a beautiful rest of 2023. Now for a brand new set of reflections- something I haven't had the time or energy to do for a few months now.

Before we pick back up where we left off in chapter 5 of the book of Matthew (about a third of the way into the Sermon On The Mount) I want to go back and kind of reset what we've learned so that as we dive into the rest of the most influential speech that has ever been given in the history of this world we'll be able to refer back to things Jesus has already set up and as He refers back to them we won't be completely left in the dark. So let's start with the audience that was there that day:

*One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them. Matthew 5:1-2 (NLT)*

We know there was a crowd but who were they? Who was this group of people that are in attendance when Jesus delivers His manifesto on what life in the Kingdom of God is supposed to look like? Well, Matthew actually describes these folks in the previous chapter:

*Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. News about him spread as far as Syria, and people soon began bringing to him all who were sick. And whatever their sickness or disease, or if they were demon possessed or epileptic or paralyzed-he healed them all. Large crowds followed him wherever he went. Matthew 4:23-25 (NLT)*

Who is in attendance that day? Well, it was kind of an odd bunch. They are the sick, the demon possessed, the poor and the powerless. This was not the sermon at the Ritz Carlton. This is more like the sermon at skid row. If it wasn't such a hot button topic politically I'd be more likely to compare it to a sermon that would be delivered at the US/Mexico border to a group of people who have nothing. That might be a better way for us to visualize the audience that day but since it's such a hot button political topic I won't use that analogy but it would be the closest I could come to picturing the group that was in attendance that day.

These people have no power, no influence, no money, no education. They have been assigned to the world's garbage can by the people of 1st century Israel. And Jesus gathers these folks together and He sits down and He basically tells them that He will use them to transform the world. How very un-strategic of Jesus.

But He still does this to this very day. He uses the weakest of things to unleash the majority of His power. And He wants to change the world through you too (and me, and the person sitting next to you, and anyone who will agree to let Him do some renovations on their hearts. So if you're sitting here reading this and thinking that you could never change then world because of some weakness that you have then you are exactly who Jesus can and will

use to change this world. You just have to say, "You can have my heart, Lord. Show me what you want from me."

**Tuesday Reflection:** Ok so we have looked at who the audience was that day when Jesus delivered the most influential speech in human history- today we'll dive into the text of the Sermon On The Mount by starting (of all places) with the beginning. We call it the Beatitudes these days and before we talk about why they're called that and what they mean let's read them:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:3-10 (NLT)*

What a strange bunch of proverbs/sayings. We'll get to what they mean in a moment but let's start with why we call them "Beatitudes". We call them that because beatitude is the Latin word for "blessed". Somehow that word has stuck and so we call this group of proverbs or sayings the Beatitudes.

But what do they mean? What are they for? I used to think they were called the Beatitudes because they were the attitudes that you should be. In other words I thought of them as proverbs of instruction. We all know those kinds of proverbs- early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy wealthy and wise, is a proverb of instruction. It tells you that if you go to bed early and wake up early you'll succeed. There are tons more but you get the gist. If we look at the Beatitudes as proverbs of instruction then we'll try to become poor in spirit so that we can inherit the Kingdom of heaven. We'll try to make ourselves more meek so we can inherit the earth (whatever that means). And on and on we go. Some of the Beatitudes are good things that we should be trying to attain to in our lives but should I be trying to mourn? To be persecuted? Probably not. Those things will come to us in the general course of our lives but I don't think Jesus is trying to get us to manufacture these things if we're not currently experiencing them.

So then what is Jesus suggesting. Well, there's another kind of proverb called a proverb of surprise. We all know these as well- the pen is mightier than the sword is a proverb of surprise. It's supposed to make us stop and think because it doesn't seem to make much sense. In what way is the pen mightier than the sword? Is that proverb suggesting I bring a pen to a sword fight? Nope. It's trying to make us think about the ways that proverb might be true in one sense or another.

I think that's mainly what the Beatitudes are. Proverbs of surprise that act as a sort of invitation to Jesus' kingdom. Remember who Jesus' audience was- the outcasts, the rejects, the dregs of society. With the Beatitudes Jesus tells these people that they're invited and blessed even if they happen to be poor in spirit because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Does that mean that those who are not poor in spirit aren't going to be part of the kingdom of heaven? No. But Jesus doesn't have to tell the insiders that they're invited. The insiders

believe that they're invited. But the poor in spirit? They've been told all their lives that they need not apply because God Himself has rejected them. Jesus turns that idea on its head so that the outsiders will know they are indeed invited and so the insiders will know that the outsiders are invited.

It was revolutionary. The Beatitudes are Jesus' invitation to the outcasts to join Him in His Kingdom and become a people who can and will change the world. His invitation is extended across the centuries to this very day. To you and me. The Beatitudes are proof that Jesus can still use the weakest people in this world to rock this world. He wants the weak to know it and He wants the powerful to know it as well. Never look at a human being made in the image of God Himself and think they could never be world changers- even if it's you you're looking at when you think it.

**Wednesday Reflection:** Ok so we know who Jesus' audience was at the Sermon On The Mount- the rejects and outcasts of society. We also know that the Beatitudes were Jesus' invitation letting all the outcasts and rejects (the poor in spirit, the meek, the mourning, the persecuted, etc...) know that even though they had a tough life and lots of struggles that they were included in the new Kingdom Jesus was bringing to this world. So what happens next? Well, Jesus enters into covenant with this ragtag mob of misfits in what seems to us a very strange way:

*You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the light of the world-like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. Matthew 5:14-16 (NLT)*

This is one of the most famous passages of literature ever recorded. The salt of the earth and the light of the world are familiar phrases even if we don't really get what they mean. When we think of someone being the salt of the earth we think of hard working, honest people who are the backbone of a community. But is that what the people who were listening that day heard Jesus saying?

Probably not. For them it would have reminded them of the covenant that God entered into with Abraham and eventually with tens of thousands of Abraham's descendants at Mt. Sinai. That covenant was sometimes called a covenant of salt in the Old Testament. It was also referred to as a covenant of light. Why?

Because salt was the only preservative known to mankind in the first century. And in a world without refrigeration or other preservatives, rot and decay were one of the greatest enemies to humans. But salt could slow down the process of rot and decay in meat and vegetables. Consequently it was one of the most valuable commodities on the face of the planet. Wars were fought over access to salt. The Romans paid their soldiers in salt early on which is why your paycheck is called your salary. And we get the word "salad" from the Roman practice of putting salt on their leafy green veggies to keep them from rotting.

Nobody had ever called these people the salt of the earth or the light of the world but as descendants of Abraham themselves they would have understood these statements to be covenantal language. A covenant is a sacred agreement between two parties- in the case of the covenants of Abraham and Moses the agreement was between the people of Israel and God Himself. Israel was to be a nation that would be salt to a decaying world and light to a world that was stumbling in darkness.

But they hadn't lived up to that covenant so now Jesus is starting over with this motley crew. How do you imagine that made this group of rejects feel? To be told they were now the salt of the earth and the light of the world? I imagine it made them feel special for the first time in an awful long time.

And guess what? Now that covenant comes across the ages to you and me. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. At least you could be. You're supposed to be if you're a follower of this guy named Jesus Who made some outrageous claims about what He could do for the human heart. You might be wondering what it looks like to be salt to a world that is dying from rot and decay. You might be wondering how to be light to a world that is stumbling in darkness. But fear not- that's what the rest of the Sermon On The Mount will be about- what does a life that is salt and light look like practically speaking. Jesus will get to that- for today all you and I have to do is decide if we're in or not.

**Thursday Reflection:** So far this week we've looked at the audience present at the Sermon On The Mount, the introduction/invitation to the outcasts (the Beatitudes) and the covenant that Jesus entered into with this ragtag mod of misfits with His words on the salt and the light. Today we're going to look at the next part of the Sermon On The Mount with Jesus' words on His mission- what He came to do:

*Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved... But I warn you-unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven! Matthew 5:17-20 (NLT)*

He starts out telling us what he didn't come to do- abolish the law of Moses and the writings of the prophets. Why did He have to tell us what He didn't come to do? Because that's what He was being accused of back then- that He didn't care about what people do or don't do. That He was teaching that it didn't matter what we do or don't do. Interestingly He is still be "accused" of the same thing today. There is no shortage of people who will tell you Jesus just wants you to be happy. That if that violates a "law" or instruction from the Bible that your happiness trumps His instructions. But it's just not true. The guidance/instructions found in the Bible are there to keep us free. When I was 17 I decided I knew better than Jesus how to run my life and I started doing the things I had been told all my life not to do. At first it was a glorious feeling that I equated with freedom but there came a day when there was a shift. I'm not even sure when it happened but I started to realize the very things that represented freedom to me in the end had enslaved me. It reminds me of something David wrote:

*I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free. Psalm 119:32 (NIV)*

When I was growing up I NEVER would have put "freedom" together with "commands" but I would now. Now I see it's God's commands/instructions/guidance that would have kept me from being enslaved. I have a feeling you might know what I'm talking about. Jesus wanted to make sure we didn't think He'd come to abolish God's instructions- He had come to pay the price for when we go astray. His Grace provides for mercy and forgiveness but it does not negate the consequences for our ignoring of His guidance. I'm still dealing with consequences from stuff that I did when I was in my late teens.

Jesus doesn't say, "you have heard the law that says, 'you shall not murder'; but I say to you... go ahead and murder whoever you want to because I've come now and all rules are out the window!". If we heard someone claim that we'd all shake our heads. It's when we want to do something that we know is outside of God's will for us that we start rationalizing and saying things like, "well Jesus would want me to have what I want so I'm going to do it..."

So what is Jesus saying? We'll look at that tomorrow but for today maybe spend some time reflecting on times you've thought you knew better than Jesus how to run your life and how did that work out for you?

**Friday Reflection:** Yesterday we looked at Jesus' mission on this earth- what He came to do. Although you might have noticed we never got to what He came to do because we spent the entire reflection looking at what He did NOT come to do (abolish the law/rules/instructions/guidance of God). So what did He come to do? Well let's look at yesterday's verse again:

*Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. Matthew 5:17 (NLT)*

He didn't come to get rid of the law- He came to fulfill it or accomplish its purpose. What does that mean? Well that brings us to today's reflection where we look at His method in accomplishing His mission:

*You have heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! Matthew 5:21-22 (NLT)*

Now before we start getting all worked up over Jesus saying we can't even be angry with someone (who could ever live up to that????) I'll just point out that He's not talking about the anger of frustration or aggravation with someone or something. Yes He'd love for us to be better at dealing with our angry outbursts but that's not what He's getting at here. The anger He's talking about here is the seething resentment and bitterness we harbor against people and wish for (or actively plot) their downfall. But that's not what I want to spend today focusing on. I want to focus on what Jesus does with the law that says "you shall not murder". He doesn't get rid of that law- He instead focuses on the root of murder- hatred, bitterness & resentment. Why? Because Jesus knows if we don't allow bitterness to build up in our hearts then it would never occur to us to murder someone. We'd never consider it.

For Jesus the method is all about your heart. It's about getting you and me to become more like Him. That's what the Sermon On The Mount is mostly- a description of how He lived His

life phrased in such a way that we see what it will take for us to live a life like Him- if we are going to be like Him then we will need to adopt his behaviors and actions.

We often think that Jesus cares mostly about what we believe and not so much what we do but it's interesting that the Sermon On The Mount is mainly about our actions and has very little about what to believe and yet when the council of Nicea met in 350 AD they wanted to determine what constituted a christian and they came up with the Apostle's creed. I believe in God the father, Almighty maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ His only son... you can google it if you want to read the whole thing but the apostles creed is almost all about what we should think or agree about and almost nothing about what a christian does or how he/she lives. I'm not saying that we earn our salvation by the things we do- we don't. We are saved by the grace of God through our faith in Jesus plus nothing. But it's interesting that when Jesus describes what a member of His Kingdom looks like it's almost all about our actions and thoughts and very little about what we think.

And when Jesus does talk about belief in the rest of the gospels it is almost exclusively about believing in Him. And so His method for fulfilling the law of Moses and the writings of the prophets revolves around our actions and our actions flow from our hearts. So for Jesus it's all about the heart.

Do you see what He's attempting to do with the Sermon On The Mount? He's trying to get into our hearts so that we organically follow the law because the law of God is no longer found on a stone tablet but rather written upon our hearts. It was His plan from the beginning:

*This is the new covenant I will make with my people on that day, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds. Hebrews 10:16 (NLT)*

This is what the Sermon On The Mount is all about. It's a description of what it looks like when God's laws are written upon our hearts rather than a stone tablet. Instead of rule following it becomes a matter of becoming more like Jesus. Letting our hearts beat in step with His. And what happens when we fail and violate God's "law" that He is attempting write upon our hearts? The very next verse from Hebrews chapter 10 tells us:

*Then he says, "I will never again remember their sins and lawless deeds." And when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices. Hebrews 10:17 (NLT)*

The more I look into all of this the more I see the amazing symmetry that God has created- the more I allow His law to be written on my heart the more beautiful and amazing my life becomes and when I fail Jesus has already provided the Grace I need for mercy and forgiveness. So why wouldn't I do the stuff my sinful nature REALLY wants to do if God's just going to forgive me for it anyways? Because of the very real consequences associated with the sin my sinful nature (not to mention the devil) tempts me to do. I can't stop all suffering in my life but I can cut back on the suffering I unleash in my own life by trusting that Jesus knows what He's talking about when it comes to what's going to bring me freedom and what's going to enslave me.

And we don't get to choose the consequences. Have you noticed that? There are things I've done that didn't seem to cause much in way of consequences and then I've done stuff that

overwhelms my life with negative consequences. What's the difference? I have no idea but I do realize now that what seems like a small thing to me may bring massive consequences.

So what should we do? Give our hearts to Jesus. That's what He wants. He wants our hearts. If He has that the rest can follow with time. This is what we've learned so far in 1/3 of the Sermon On The Mount. We will continue next week looking at the rest of Jesus' words about what it means to become salt in a world that is decaying and rotting and light in a world that is stumbling in darkness and as we do we will find more instruction that the Master wants to write on our hearts about how to naturally obey God's "law" instead of living a life filled with guilt, shame and regret.