

Session 3

NO ORDINARY FAITH

Matthew 5:38-48

Memory Verse

⁴⁴ *But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,*

⁴⁵ *so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.*

– MATTHEW 5:44-45A, CSB




No Ordinary Faith

THEOLOGICAL THEME: In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus clearly portrayed God's standard for all people and made it clear that no one can meet the standard. For those who trust in Christ, this message causes them to cling to Christ all the more for grace and transformation. For those who are not trusting in Christ, this message reveals spiritual bankruptcy and the need for a Rescuer.

Mark was a missionary in Afghanistan for almost 10 years. One might assume that an assignment in Afghanistan would be difficult. Difficult, however, is an understatement. A good amount of Mark's time was spent negotiating hostage situations. Yet, in the midst of chaos and violence, many Afghan families turned to Christ through his witness. After several years, Mark asked one of the first Afghan converts about what had originally made him consider the claims of Christianity. The man told Mark that the first time that he and his family visited Mark's house something happened that completely changed the way they saw the foreigners and their message. The whole group was watching something on the television. Suddenly, Mark's little daughter spilled a bowl of popcorn. Mark didn't yell at her or ignore it and wait for his wife to do something. Mark got down on his hands and knees and helped his daughter pick up the popcorn piece by piece. The Afghan man had never seen anything like that. It was crazy to him. A man stooping down on the ground to help a child is something he would have never done.



What things drew you to Christ before you came to faith in Him?


 How have you witnessed ordinary acts in the life of a person who pointed extraordinarily to Christ?

Session Summary

So far in the Sermon on the Mount, we have seen how believers are blessed despite the difficulties of living for God in a fallen world because their future hope is secure (5:1-12). Next, Jesus used God's Law and applied it to the heart in order to give Christians a blueprint to follow and to give non-Christians a clear picture of their depravity (5:13-37). Today we will consider how Jesus emphasized to His hearers (both Christians and non-Christians) that God doesn't simply expect a valiant effort, but a life of perfect obedience to and imitation of God Himself. This simultaneously pushes Christians to cling to Christ for grace and transformation and non-Christians to call out for mercy or reject the gospel.

1. Instructions for Perfection (Matt. 5:38-44)

In the first section of our passage, Jesus expanded on two verses from the Old Testament. "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" is found in Exodus 21:23-25, which says, "If there is an injury, then you must give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, bruise for bruise, wound for wound." The second reference, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy," is found in Leviticus 19:18, which says, "Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord." It is worth noting that the "hate your enemy" bit isn't a part of the original formulation Jesus referenced. Most likely it was added over time in oral formulations of the principle.

 What is the essence of Jesus' teaching in verses 38-44? What did Jesus command His listeners to do?

The Sermon on the Mount is full of surprising statements, but these few verses may be the most controversial and infuriating. Think about what Jesus said. Let's just consider these statements:

- Don't resist an evildoer.
- If anyone slaps you, let him slap the other cheek also.
- If anyone sues you, give them more than they are seeking.
- If anyone manipulates you to serve them, serve them even more.
- Don't turn anyone away.
- Love your enemy.
- Pray for your persecutors.

This counsel seems ludicrous. How do we even make sense of it? In these verses, Jesus commanded His hearers to go against every natural fiber of their beings. He asked them to do something that seemed completely foolish and dangerous.


? How are these commands different than the commands that immediately precede them in the Sermon on the Mount?

Before this section Jesus warned His audience about anger, lust, divorce, and oaths. All of those commands seem somewhat reasonable, or at the very least it seems like we have control over those situations. We decide if we will become angry or if we will allow ourselves to think lustful thoughts. The commands in our current passage, however, are different. We are asked to give up control and place ourselves at the mercy of those who hate us and desire to hurt us. We are asked to abandon a perspective of self-preservation and respond to whatever curse comes our way, not with passivity, but with blessing!

? What do we learn about ourselves when we truly examine our lives against this standard?


These commands are frightening, maybe even frustrating. Does Jesus really expect people to live like this? What was He getting at? When reading these verses, we often look for some sort of alternate interpretation, because if we are honest, then we will have to admit that we don't measure up to this standard. In fact, we may even have to say that it seems crazy to even try. Do we really want to live like that?

How these commands make a person feel is a barometer of his or her spiritual state. The way a person responds to them shows what his or her relationship to Christ is. Those who are outside of Christ and are righteous in their own eyes will reject these commandments as being weak, unrealistic, or just plain foolish. Those who are in Christ will recognize that Jesus described exactly what He did for them. Further, the person who is in Christ has been given new spiritual life to obey the commands. A true Christian won't reject these hard teachings but will cling to Christ all the more tightly for both their forgiveness of sin and power to obey.

 **Application: How does your heart respond to Jesus' commands in verses 38-44?**

2. The Model of Perfection (Matt. 5:20, 48)

Jesus commanded His listeners, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (v. 48). That statement was a bookend to all of the commands that Jesus clarified beginning in verse 21. In verse 20, He said, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven." These two verses helped His listeners understand both the consequence and the standard. The standard is perfection and the consequence is eternal.

 **How might we become more righteous than the scribes and the Pharisees so that we might enter heaven? How might we become perfect like God?**

Jesus said that our righteousness must exceed the scribes and the Pharisees, or we will never enter the kingdom of Heaven. Further, Jesus said that we must be perfect as God is perfect. He didn't leave it to our imaginations what it means to meet that standard. He laid it out quite clearly in verses 21-47.

The problem is that no one's righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees. No one is able to keep Jesus' word perfectly in order to earn entrance into the Kingdom. All have sinned and fall short of God's standard (Rom. 3:23). There are none who are righteous, not even one (Rom. 3:10). We can never be righteous by obeying the law. Our hearts are bent toward sin from birth, and as soon as we are able to break God's law we do, and then we keep doing it.

Thankfully, Jesus was different. Jesus was fully human and tempted in every way that we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). Jesus' righteousness was greater than the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus did live a perfect life in perfect obedience to the Word of God. He pleased God in every way.

For those who trust in Christ, His righteousness is credited to their account when they believe in Him. In other words, Jesus didn't just die a sinner's death in man's place, but He also lived a righteous life on their behalf. Not only was man's sin reckoned to Jesus' account, but Jesus' righteousness was reckoned to those who trust Him. Therefore, we can have a righteousness that exceeds the scribes and Pharisees. We can be perfect. But this is all grace and it is only through the finished work of Christ on the cross.



What are some ways Jesus perfectly fulfilled the commands of God that people might be saved through Him?

Jesus never became sinfully angry. He didn't lust. He didn't divorce. He never made careless promises that He broke. Jesus practiced what He preached. Jesus didn't resist the evildoer; He did turn the other cheek, gave to His accusers, served His persecutors, loved His enemies, and prayed for His attackers. Jesus did all of this in obedience to the Father as payment for our sin.

Furthermore, some of the enemies that Jesus loved as He hung on the cross are sitting in this room. When Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount, He commanded His listeners to be like God by loving their enemies. All the while Jesus knew that He would obey that command by going to the cross in love for every person whose sin sets them apart from God.

? Application: How does recognizing Jesus' work on your behalf give you a desire to live in accordance with God's commands?

3. Only the Perfect are Rewarded (Matt. 5:46-48)

Jesus told His listeners to be perfect as God the Father is perfect. In order to be perfect and righteous, they would have to obey the set of laws He laid out for them. The standard was much higher than anyone in His hearing would have guessed, but that was the point. In order for people to seek salvation in Christ, they must first understand that they have fallen short of the mark. Furthermore, if Christians are going to walk in a manner pleasing to God, they must cling to Christ, both for salvation and sanctification. They have to understand that apart from Him, they can do nothing (John 15:5).

? What reward is there for those who live obediently before God? Where does the ability to do so come from?

Only those who live according to these standards will be rewarded. The ultimate reward is eternal life. Those who live this kind of selfless life do so because of the power of Christ working in them. We should be careful not to think that Jesus is saying to non-Christians that if they can somehow start to live in this way, then they will earn passage to heaven. First of all, people cannot simply start to live this way

by their own strength and according to their own will. Secondly, even if they could somehow turn their way of living to perfect obedience to God's Word, they have already been found guilty of transgression. No amount of good deeds can erase that stain.

Christians have the promise of heaven. An eternity with God in heaven is a Christian's sure and anticipated hope through Christ. But, there are also rewards and blessings for Christians here and now when they obey God's commands. For example, God promises to give His children a peace that passes understanding when they offer their anxieties to Him through prayer.

? Application: How does the gospel motivate Christians to live in such a counter-cultural way?


Christians still battle the flesh and still fall short of perfection. However, a true Christian will desire to obey God's commands and rejoice in them. A true Christian will hate sin and grieve over sin when they transgress God's law. Over time, Christians are conformed more and more to the image of Christ, and less and less to the ways of this world.


When Christians remember and rehearse the gospel of Christ, then they are more able and willing to live according to these commands. Milton Vincent puts it this way: "Doing good and showing love to those who have wronged me is always the opposite of what my sinful flesh wants me to do. Nonetheless, when I remind myself of my sins against God and of His forgiving and generous grace toward me, I give the gospel an opportunity to reshape my perspective and to put me in a frame of mind wherein I actually desire to give this same grace to those who have wronged me."¹


Conclusion

The commands that Jesus delivered in this passage set the bar too high for us. We can't live up to it. But Jesus did. He obeyed these commands even to the point of suffering and dying for sinners. Jesus loved His enemies by bearing their sin on Calvary.

Christians now strive to obey these commands because they want to please their heavenly Father and are given power to do so through Jesus' work on their behalf—both in His righteous living and dying a sinner's death. Those who are not followers of Christ are urged to look to Christ to take away their sins and to make them righteous. Apart from Christ, there is no hope.

 What is your reaction to the commands of Jesus in this section? How are you challenged? How does this drive you to Jesus?

 How does living in the way that God commands change our relationships with one another?

 How might living in this way give opportunity to share with others the reason that you live differently than the world?

CHRIST CONNECTION: For Christians, Christ is the one who made a way for them to live a life that is pleasing to God. For non-Christians, Christ is the hope they need when they realize their inability to achieve the perfection that God deserves and demands.

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: When the message of Jesus is undergirded by a life that looks like Jesus, it's like dynamite in the hands of a missionary God.



FOR NEXT WEEK

Just Do It

Main Passages

- Matthew 6:1-18

Session Outline

1. Giving that Glorifies God (Matt. 6:1-4)
2. Praying that Pleases God (Matt. 6:5-15)
3. Fasting that Focuses on God (Matt. 6:16-18)

Memorize

⁴⁴ *But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,*

⁴⁵ *a so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.*

- Matthew 5:44-45a, CSB

Daily Readings

- Monday - 2 Corinthians 9:7
- Tuesday - 1 Timothy 6:17-19
- Wednesday - Matthew 4:4
- Thursday - Matthew 9:15
- Friday - Mark 11:24
- Saturday - James 5:16

References

¹Vincent, Milton. *A Gospel Primer*. Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2008.