

## The Sermon on the Mount Matthew 5:3 – 7:27

- (5:48) Theme of the lesson: Be consistent as God is consistent.
  - Act on what you believe.
  - Make applications of a principle across all of life, not just narrowly.
  - Be aware of contradictions created by a chosen application.
  - God is consistent because that is His nature. We should be the same.
- (5:3 – 12) Blessed (above the cares of this life) are people with a connection to God. Being consistent with their nature as the people of God implies the following conclusions:
  - (3) The humble can be such because they understand that they are in God's kingdom. They do not feel a need to be important on earth.
  - (4) The faithful have an expectation of comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3 – 7) whereas the outsider can only mask grief.
  - (5) The faithful can be gentle and soft-spoken because they know that they are the inheritors of the kingdom.
  - (6) God promises that the desire to grow, an earmark of the faithful, will be satisfied.
  - (7) The faithful have the character trait of mercy (an unquenchable desire to fix what ails you) because they are selfless, so they will be dealt with mercifully by God.
  - (8) The faithful have no need for self-deception to get through the day, so purity is an option for them. Such an attitude allows the faithful to understand God.
  - (9) The faithful want what is best for all, so endeavor to mediate conflict. As such they demonstrate that they are part of the family of God.
  - (10 – 12) The faithful understand persecution as a signal that they are doing something right since their opponents have reacted so strongly. Remember how the prophets were treated. You are in good company.
- (5:13 – 16) Jesus addressed the crowd (see 7:28 – 8:1) as though they were all seeking God, rather than assuming that they were all of weak-if-any faith. Those who are consistent act out these illustrations in a multitude of ways.
  - (13) Salt was used as a seasoning, a preservative, and an herbicide. The meaning here could be seasoning or preservative. Herbicide was the contrast. Since the context gives no hints, both applications should be investigated.
    - Seasoning, as in Colossians 4:6, would imply that the presentations by the faithful should be witty and positive, not dull or harsh.
    - Preservative would imply that the presentations of the faithful will have the desired result of rescuing the perishing, preventing their spiritual decomposition.
  - (14 – 16) The purpose of a light source is to illuminate. Therefore,
    - The faithful should have the characteristic of being well known to those around them.
    - The faithful should light up those around them, as opposed to making them dark, as in depressed or oppressed.
    - The godly activities (good works) of the faithful should be so obviously beyond normal human ability that the observers skip praising the person and instead attribute the ability to God.
- (5:17 – 20) Jesus' relationship to the Law was that of a good Israelite. He was not above it and had no mission to change it. (Note: the end of the Law already had been predicted in Daniel 9:26 – 27, which occurred in 70 AD, several decades after Jesus.) Jesus was

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consistent in that He was born under the Law and was subject to it. He had no right to change it.

- (17 – 18) Because Jesus' teaching was unorthodox, some could make the application that the Law was to be ignored. So, He stated clearly that He had no such plans.
- (19) Jesus taught the "lost sheep of Israel," all of whom were under the Law. He was not implying that the Law would continue forever (as Adventists attempt). If He did, then Daniel failed.
- (20) But, Jesus raised the expectations of the audience. In that time, the Pharisees (and, to a lesser extent, the Sadducees) were held up as models of righteousness. Jesus set the bar significantly higher.
- (5:21 – 47) Jesus gave a series of examples of how the "righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees" was inconsistent, how the principles within their teachings failed to be applied to all of life.
  - (21 – 22) Murder has a wider application that simply depriving another of physical life. If physical murder is bad (a conclusion to which all agreed), then spiritual murder would be worse. Jesus' examples are times when "brothers" defeat the family atmosphere of the kingdom, pushing some out, effectively killing their spirits.
  - (23 – 26) Religious activities and personal relationships had become separated. The parable implies that the one bringing the sacrifice was in the wrong in the earthly relationship, so, to be consistent, could not legitimately celebrate forgiveness because he had not taken ownership of his misdeeds.
  - (27 – 32) Everyone agreed that adultery was wrong (although the Sadducees had some clever work-arounds). However, to be consistent, we must consider that thought must come before actions, so the precipitating thoughts (lust) were equally bad.
    - Jesus emphasized the importance of this conclusion because adultery was explained away by many. The extreme examples of plucking out an eye or cutting off a hand were obviously figures of speech since a body part cannot think, so cutting it off would not change the offending attitude.
    - Jesus continued with the Sadducees' argument about divorce from Deuteronomy 24:1. Although not mentioned here, the promises made in marriage necessarily must be broken in divorce, which is inconsistent. It is interesting that promise-breaking is the next subject Jesus covered.
    - Jesus continued with the repercussions of divorce:
      - The line translated "except for fornication" is badly translated and misses the point. Jesus said, "Regardless of your arguments about fornication." Jesus noted the debate of the time between leading rabbis about the acceptable causes for divorce. The common translation makes Jesus agree with the Pharisee position. But the disciples were shocked when Jesus repeated this concept in Matthew 19:9. Obviously, Jesus greatly raised the bar and the disciples could not fathom it.
      - Jesus pointed out that divorce caused more problems than just breaking a promise. The common practices surrounding divorce gave a convenient excuse to avoid feeling bad about sin, not unlike the previous parable about the man on his way to offer a sacrifice.

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- (33 – 37) Oaths imply that there are times when lies are acceptable. Just avoid them by meaning what you say at all times. The same idea also may be found in James 5:12. Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians that he had that same characteristic (2 Corinthians 1:17 – 18).
- (38 – 42) The citations in the Law are Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21, which set the proper punishment after being convicted of doing harm to another. A system of justice was part of the Law (*e.g.*, Deuteronomy 17:8 – 13). The powerful were not to get less (Deuteronomy 1:16 – 17), nor was anyone to be punished to a greater degree than the harm done. This principle of justice was being misapplied as license to do harm.
  - “Turn the other cheek.” Jesus’ point was that one does not have a right to retribution. In fact, reacting to evil often just makes more evil.
  - “Give him your cloak also.” The assumption is that a proper court determined that you owed your tunic to the plaintiff. Jesus’ point was to acknowledge the rightful penalty and express your remorse by giving more than was required, rather than stopping with exactly what was owed.
  - “Go the extra mile.” A Roman soldier could compel anyone to carry his pack one mile, at which he would compel someone else. In contrast to the misapplication of “an eye for an eye,” the Law did not teach that they should yield to this Roman decree only to the necessary degree. Jesus’ point was that “going the extra mile” would have a positive impact.
  - “Give to him who asks.” Do not turn away the borrower. This is a part of sharing, that all the faithful are family. So, sharing is normal, not governed by limits.
- (43 – 47) “Love your neighbor” is from Leviticus 19:18. However, many rabbis had used an earlier version of “the silence of the Scriptures” to add the “logical” conclusion, “Hate your enemies.” Of course, the definition of “neighbor” was the foundation for many excuses (*e.g.*, Luke 10:29).
  - (45) Loving enemies makes us like God. Obviously, God does what is best for His enemies (the sun and rain).
  - (46) Be consistent. Love the unlovely.
  - (47) A step beyond “doing what is best for the other person” is to “greet” them – have social interaction
- (6:1 – 4) Be consistent in sharing, which is about the other person, not me.
  - Note: Jesus tried to keep His compassionate deeds as quiet as He could. Certainly, some of His miracles were performed as proof. But, most of His miracles were just compassion, which He specifically asked be kept quiet.
  - (1 – 2) Accolades from others means God does not need to notice. Philanthropy was big business in that time. Wealthy people would hire others to go before them into the Temple, playing trumpets and such, to announce a donation.
  - (3 – 4) In contrast, the hidden or anonymous gift is noticed by God.
- (6:5 – 13) Be consistent in prayer, which is between you and God, not the general public.
  - (5 – 6) Like sharing, ostentatious prayers are rewarded through similarly dysfunctional people, so God does not pay attention.
  - (7 – 8) Pagan prayers often use magic formulae. The Israelites had picked up some bad habits. Be consistent with the idea of prayer; talk to God. No one else needs to

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- know. And God knows what is in your mind before you speak it, and what you actually need.
- (9 – 15) Model prayer in light of consistency, the contrast being wordiness saying just the right thing. Jesus taught this same prayer to His disciples in Luke 11:2 – 4 in which the context was persistence and confidence.
    - (9) Start with honoring the nature of God. It puts things in perspective. Note that Paul suggested building prayers on a foundation of thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6). The consistency factor is in saying what you think, not reciting a formula.
    - (10) John the Baptist and Jesus focused on the impending Kingdom, which arrived in Acts 2. Further, He suggested praying that the desires of God occur on earth, at least to the degree that God gets His desires in heaven, which at the time was not all that often since Satan and his angels were still in heaven. Jesus suggested invoking God’s promises. The consistency angle is in invoking promises that are important to you at the moment.
    - (11) Jesus suggested, after honoring God and invoking promises, to ask for what you think you need on earth. In contrast to the magic formula prayers, this is about what is most on your mind regarding physical life.
    - (12 – 13) Jesus suggested closing with spiritual needs: forgiveness, less temptation, less exposure to deceit. The forgiveness idea is repeated in 6:14 – 15 after the prayer, perhaps because the Pharisees and Sadducees were much less forgiving, and Jesus had already announced that greater righteous than theirs was necessary (5:20).
    - Interestingly, the Lord’s Prayer has become the “vain repetition” against which Jesus argued.
  - (6:16 – 18) Be consistent in fasting. The point is to be so wrapped up in prayer that there is no time for food. Using the event to gain public aggrandizement is disingenuous.
  - (6:19 – 34) Be consistent in what you hold most dear.
    - (19 – 20) Jesus addressed the crowd as though they were devoted to God already, rather than assuming that they are completely wrapped up in earthly things. This first comparison assumes that they value the eternal kingdom, so He just reminds them of what should be obvious: earthly stuff decomposes whereas spiritual stuff endures.
    - (21) The key to the desired attitude is the heart. How do we rearrange ourselves so that this heart is making the decisions? The following verses tell how.
    - (22 – 23) See clearly. In keeping with the “treasures” in verses 19 – 20, know the value of each of the various goals available. If we do not see clearly, then we will be stuck in darkness, which represents both eternal darkness and the darkness of a pointless life on earth.
    - (24) You cannot serve God and riches at the same time. Pick one.
    - (25 – 34) Promises that are difficult to fathom:
      - Being alive, food, drink, and clothing are fundamentals. Most start their faith after these have been satisfied to some arbitrary standard, the arbitrary standard being the source of much confusion. Jesus’ promise is not that these will always be supplied sufficiently, because many early Christians died or were deprived of these necessities. Jesus’ point was that devotion to God comes even before the fundamentals because devotion to God is more important.

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- (26) Jesus used the illustration of birds being cared for by God. But also note that birds die due to famine, predation, and natural disasters. The promise was not that faithful people always would be fed by God, but that they would have enough (in God's eyes, not ours) while we lived.
- (27) Be realistic about how much you can control: not much.
- (28 – 30) As with food, early Christians were not constantly provided with sufficient clothing. Rather, they would have enough (in God's eyes) while alive, but departing was better. Being arrayed in poor clothing would look glorious to God.
- (31 – 34) Jesus used the Gentiles as His example, perhaps to avoid alienating the crowd whom He had been addressing as though they were all faithful. The point was that the Gentiles of the neighboring countries, with whom they would be familiar, constantly seek earthly comfort and succeed no better, so the Israelites can observe that a worldly attitude is not beneficial toward achieving acceptance into the Kingdom of God which John and Jesus have been preaching. The line in verse 33, "And all these things will be added to you," has been viewed in a worldly manner. From a worldly perspective, the faithful of the Old Testament suffered greatly (see 5:12) yet are counted "above the cares of this life." So, Jesus' point was that God would provide as He has provided for the faithful of old – not always comfortably by worldly standards, but always comfortably by spiritual standards. So, don't worry about it.
- (7:1 – 5) Be consistent with standards of judgment.
  - This type of judgement relates to separating one thing from another. Some application were separating wheat from chaff, right from wrong, or guilty from innocent. All decision-making is not included. Jesus was not addressing making a choice or expressing a preference.
  - Note that no Scripture is cited. The Law does remind the Israelites not to give preference to the rich as in Leviticus 19:15. But Jesus just make a generalization that is obviously true.
  - Scary verse: 7:2. The Corinthian Christians took this too far (1 Corinthians 5:9 – 13).
  - Humorous illustration. Jesus was neither dull nor constantly serious.
- (7:6) Be consistent with the godly things.
  - Similar to Matthew 15:14 where Jesus told His disciples to ignore the Pharisees.
  - The overall theme of consistency hopefully prevents taking this one sentence too far in either direction.
    - Some will not share the gospel with people who have not yet cleaned up their live.
    - Some are afraid of being attacked, so keep everything inside the trusted group without accounting for how the trusted group became such.
    - Rather, Jesus' caution was to not waste your time with those who have no interest and with those who can be expected to react violently. We need wisdom to determine who fits Jesus' description.
- (7:7 – 11) Be consistent with expectations of God. Consider His nature.
  - Applications of asking, seeking, and knocking are absent. Jesus was giving the audience food for thought, not rules to follow.

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- Jesus put limits on for what to ask, seek and knock by using the father image. Fathers are not controlled by children.
- The underlying question is whether the individual sincerely believes that the Father will respond in a good way, even if I do not see it as “good” at the time.
- (7:12) Be consistent in your treatment of others. Fairness is not just for me. The Law and the Prophets emphasized equality. Inequity is the driving force for any legal system.
- (7:13 – 14) Be consistent about pursuing life.
  - God has never expected a big turnout. Consider the size of the courtyard of the tabernacle compared to the population of Israel. Everyone was required to attend the festivals. Only a small percentage did. Therefore, the road to life must be less travelled.
  - The majority rarely has the correct answer. That is just reality.
- (7:15 – 20) Be consistent about to whom you listen.
  - Inaccurate teachers do not come with labels.
  - Evaluate the quality of the teacher by the fruit produced. The question is the nature of the fruit we expect. Many expect charisma, large followings, and promises of health and wealth.
  - The thought experiment about fruit should lead to an expectation of joy, peace, grace, and family.
- (7:21 – 27) Be consistent about whom you claim to follow. The following is the criterion for acceptance, not the claim.
  - The “doing” in 7:21 can lead to legalism. However, note that Jesus gave no specific practices, only general principles. Those in 7:22 depended on specific practices for their acceptance rather than His “saying,” which are thought-provoking principles with many potential applications.
  - The house foundation illustration placed Jesus’ principles as that which supported life. Specific actions without those principles inexorably lead to internal contradictions, so are the house without foundation.
- (7:28 – 29) Why were the crowds astonished?
  - Jesus’ only citations of Scripture regarded their misapplication.
  - Jesus spoke truisms: obviously true generalizations. His hearers had the liberty to make their own applications.
  - While thought-provoking, Jesus was easy to follow.
  - The scribes based each argument on certain Scriptures, had no foundation principles against which to check conclusions, and were very complicated.