

## **Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Lecture 7, Matthew 5 The Sermon on the Mount**

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Matthew. This is session 7 on the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5.

As we turn to the Sermon on the Mount, we have to keep in mind the preceding context that sets up for it, which we've just summarized in the previous essay.

Jesus' teaching summarized, repent, and light of the coming kingdom. At his turn, as in the Old Testament prophets, get ready for the future era. And then this message of Jesus, as it's summarized in 4:17, is fleshed out in five main discourse sections, the ethics of the kingdom, the proclamation of the kingdom, parables emphasizing the presence of the kingdom, seven or eight of them, relationships in the kingdom, and then the future kingdom and judgment and the religious establishment.

There it also has seven or eight parables in that section, but those seven or eight parables deal with the future of the kingdom rather than the presence. So, in Matthew five through seven, this section addresses especially the ethics of the kingdom, the kingdom of God, and what repentance looks like. This discourse and also the discourse in 23 through 25, or if you want to count it 24 and 25, those are the longest discourses, the first and the last discourses.

There are a number of interpretations that have been offered of the Sermon on the Mount. There was the more literal approach to it, held by the Desert Fathers, St. Francis, and Anabaptists with regard to the civil law, not swearing oaths or with the Desert Fathers sacrificing everything because of our treasure in heaven, and so on. The medieval approach usually was a higher ethic for the clergy.

The clergy had to fulfill the Sermon on the Mount, but it wasn't expected for everybody because it was just considered impossible for everybody. Then there was the law versus grace interpretation. Well, this is like the law, and it's just meant to drive you to grace by showing you that it's impossible to keep.

And then there was the liberal social gospel approach. This was how we should transform society to conform to this. And then the dispensational approach, which said, well, this is not for this dispensation, it's for a different one, an earlier one.

The interim ethic, a mistaken belief in imminence, Albert Schweitzer, that Jesus believed that this is how you had to live just for the little bit of time before the parousia, before the coming of the kingdom. And Jesus expected that would be any

day now, and it didn't happen. And then there's the existentialist approach, especially Rudolf Bultmann was famous for that, where it's a demand for decision.

It's just meant to challenge you to respond to God in a radical way. Well, there may be some truth in many of these, and maybe not completely truth in all of these. I mean, the literal does challenge us the way Jesus meant to challenge us.

There's a lot of hyperbole in the Sermon on the Mount. Hyperbole is a rhetorical overstatement to drive home the point. Well, if you take it literally, it certainly drives home the point.

It grabs your attention the way the message originally would have. But then there are some things that, well, as we'll see, probably were not meant to be taken completely literally. But we can appreciate those who have emphasized the values by taking it literally.

Hierarchy for a clergy, I'm not really sure you get that from this passage. Jesus is addressing the disciples at the beginning, but we see at the end of the message he's addressing the crowds. So, it's kind of for everybody who's listening, and disciples actually are not just clergy.

Disciples are all of us who follow Jesus. Law versus grace, well, I'm not sure that that was Jesus' point, but it can have that effect. Certainly, as we see the challenges, it drives us to depend on God's grace.

The liberal social gospel, well, it does have implications for society. But we need to keep in mind also that this is not something that can be lived out by everybody. It's something to be lived out by people who are willing to follow Jesus' teachings.

I mean, you can tell everybody to turn the other cheek, but the only people who are really going to turn the other cheek in obedience to this will be those who want to follow Jesus. And then you have the dispensational approach, the old joke that has been told about the old-line dispensationalists, not the progressive dispensationalists, that a boy comes back from getting in a fight and his mother says, don't you know you're supposed to turn the other cheek? To which he responds, oh, Ma, that was only for the Jews. But this and the interim ethic both at least emphasize the fact that Jesus was speaking in a radical way to his contemporaries to get ready for the kingdom.

But we don't believe with the interim ethic that Jesus was mistaken about his belief in imminence. We believe that that demand is still upon us. One approach that pulls together a lot of the best of many approaches is the approach of inaugurated eschatology.

This is a goal. It's consummated in the kingdom. We work for it now.

We seek to obey it in our lives now. It's a repentant lifestyle now. But ultimately, it's a lifestyle of the way the kingdom will be, where we will be these kinds of people through and through.

But we strive to be these kinds of people now because the kingdom is already as well as not yet because Jesus has already come as well as is coming. The earliest Christians did demand literal obedience to this. That was the usual approach that we find in the Church Fathers.

But they didn't do it legalistically. They did it as signs of obedience to the kingdom, not always in the Church Fathers, but in the New Testament certainly. This has been pointed out by Debelius, pointed out by Stanley Hauerwas, and others.

If we look at this speech rhetorically, now this is not a Greco-Roman speech and it would not be classified very easily in those terms, although some have tried to do it. But if we did try to classify what's the function of this rhetoric, what's the function of this speech, it would be deliberative, that is, placing its demands on us, inviting us to behave a certain way. Hearing it afresh today, we need to keep in mind that it's not just ethics.

It's also Christology. The climax in chapter 7, verses 21 through 27 has to do with obeying Jesus and how we are called by the Father to submit to Jesus' words. But we also need, with regard to ethics, to hear it in all of its radical ferocity, and its radical demands on our lives.

It's not meant for us to just say, well, that's just hyperbole, so I can dismiss it. That's not the point of hyperbole. The point of hyperbole is to get our attention and challenge us, and we need to let it do that.

But we also need to keep in mind the narrative context of the gospel. It's conditioned with grace. For those of us who tend to be introspective, and especially those of us who tend to look down on ourselves and feel like, oh, I can never get this right, we need to remember the message of grace that comforts us.

This is part of a larger context of the gospel. But for those who tend to be proud of their religious achievements, those who tend to look down on others for not being as religious as they are, this is meant to be heard as a challenge that puts us all on the same level. We all need grace.

Now, the sayings are not completely in the same sequence in Matthew and in Luke. Matthew 5-7, much of the material you find in Luke 6, but you also find it in some

other passages in Luke, Luke 13, and so forth. But remember, the rearrangement of sayings was common.

Epitomes or summaries of someone's teaching could rearrange sayings. That was not the issue. They could be rearranged topically.

So, the fact that Matthew and Luke are often in common sequences is very nice, but we don't have to expect that this is exactly the same sequence in both or exactly the same sequence in which Jesus spoke it, or that Jesus had to speak all this on one occasion because that's simply not the way these things were written. But many of these things seem to have been spoken on one occasion. We can see that by comparing Matthew and Luke.

Rhetoric also allowed for rearrangement. And when rabbis recited teachings, they didn't recite them in chronological order. They would draw teachings from various places.

Again, biographies were not in chronological order. So, if somebody looks at this and says, whoa, this is in a different place in this gospel than in this gospel, don't worry about it. That's the way people wrote.

That was expected. Jesus' teachings. I want to look a little bit at the nature of Jesus' teachings as we start into the Sermon on the Mount, and I'll raise some issues for questions that I'll resolve better later, but I'll raise them here.

Jesus' teachings. There are some different Old Testament rhetorical forms that play into Jesus' teachings, and some of those had developed beyond the Old Testament by Jesus' day, commonly used by other Jewish sages. So, these were familiar ways of communicating, but usually, you'd have a sage, you'd have a prophet, they weren't exactly the same thing.

But Jesus and his person draw together many different styles of teaching. For instance, he uses proverbs and parables, like a sage would. Old Testament sages, and also in the interim period, like in the book of Sirach and so on, Jewish sages continued to use these forms and developed these forms.

And yet, Jesus also says things like Woe to you, Capernaum. He speaks like a prophet and speaks of judgment in the temple. So, he speaks oracles to some extent.

Also, we have some Midrash, where Jesus expounds scripture, or he gets into scripture debates with the Pharisees. Like most Jewish sages, Jesus had both distinctive and common characteristics in his teaching. Amen, I say to you.

Well, you know, amen, you could say it at the end of a prayer, but you didn't normally preface your statements with that. That's a distinctive expression for Jesus' authority. Unlike many other rabbis, Jesus doesn't cite earlier traditions.

He doesn't say, Well, Rabbi Akiba citing Yochanan ben Zekai, citing Hillel, citing Shemaiah and Obtelian, or something like that. He just says, I say to you, he speaks as if on his own authority, or directly appeals to the Father's authority. Something else very distinctive about Jesus is that other rabbis didn't go around hinting that they were God.

But some other expressions that Jesus used were very common in his day. Parables and proverbs were common fare among other teachers. Hyperbole, a rhetorical overstatement, was very common for grabbing hearers' attention.

It's not unique to Jesus. It's part of the expected teaching style of the day. Humor, for instance, trying to take the splinter out of somebody else's eye when you've got a big tree sticking out of your own.

And other kinds of graphic devices like gnashing of teeth and people being cut up. You know, they didn't have visual aids, so to speak, but they could appeal to people's imagination when they spoke by using very graphic images that would get people's attention and stay in their minds. The nature of Jesus' ancient Jewish rhetoric, looking at hyperbole and so on, the graphic way that Jesus would speak.

Well, how far do we press Jesus' words literally? Well, that might depend on which words. Take, for example, Jesus' warning that whoever remarries commits adultery. Now, if this is literal, then all remarriages are adulterous.

Not as some people today take it, just the wedding. But no, the marriage is adulterous. Therefore, Christian pastors would need to break up second marriages, and third marriages, even if these happen before the person's conversion.

Imagine the pastoral implications of this doctrine. Now, just in case anybody doesn't see the latter part of this video, I'm going to argue that's not what he's saying. However, it is meant to seize our attention, to force us to think about how important it is to keep our marriage together, insofar as it depends on us.

Jesus regularly uses graphic images to hold people's attention. Think, for example, of the king to whom a servant gets in debt more than 10,000 talents. That was probably more than the total amount of money in circulation in any nation back then, possibly excluding the Roman Empire.

What king would let someone get that far in debt to him? Obviously, this king does not have the best math skills, right? But this was a graphic way of showing just how

we have sinned against the infinite God, and therefore our debt is infinite before God. Or how about the servant who abused his fellow servants? After denouncing the religious establishment of his own day, Jesus warns us not to be like that. When he comes again, such abusive ministers, he says, would be cut into pieces and thrown into hell.

That's fairly graphic imagery. An earlier reviewer of Jesus' teachings, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was martyred under the Nazis, he refused to give in to the Nazis, he pointed out in his *Cross of Discipleship*, writing about the rich young ruler, that theologians have too often spent more time trying to get around this passage than figuring out how we can obey its message. Soren Kierkegaard was a philosopher earlier than that, and he would have agreed.

He said that you know, today's massive Bible interpreters have damaged more than helped our understanding of the Bible. Jesus said, if you want to be perfect, go sell everything you have, and give to the poor. That's addressed to the rich young ruler.

And Kierkegaard said that, whoa, if we did that, we'd all become beggars, the whole society. We would be sunk if it weren't for Christian scholarship. Happily, the scholars show us how we can get around the implications of Jesus' teachings.

And that we Protestants, want everybody to have the Bible in their own language. And then after we give it to them, we tell them not to believe it, not to carry out its message when it talks about, you know, caring for the poor and so on. If we listen to Jesus' words, he pointed out, it might upset us the same way they upset some of his contemporaries.

I mean, it wasn't just to the rich young ruler, but in Luke chapter 14, verse 33, he says to all his disciples, if anyone wants to be my disciple, let them give up all their possessions. You know, many church people wouldn't have liked Jesus today either. Anyway, my point with all this is that the demands of the kingdom are radical.

And some of it may be hyperbole, but we need to let it address us and challenge us. In the setting of this message, Jesus sat on the mountain. Now in Matthew, it's a mountain.

In Luke, it's a level place. How do those fit together? Well, hill country was very common in Judea and Galilee. And there were some flat places, some level places in the hill country.

So, you could speak of it as mountainous. The word mountain can cover that. And it could also be a plateau in a mountainous region.

But I think there's a reason why Matthew prefers the language of the mountain. Lots of things in Matthew's gospel take place in a mountain. Not just the transfiguration, but many things.

Some have suggested that it's like Moses giving the Torah from the mountain since Jesus is going to expound the Torah and give something like a new Torah, as many see it. Jesus is greater than those who sit on the seat of Moses, Matthew 23.2. Why did he sit to teach? You see the same thing in Luke chapter 4 at the synagogue in Nazareth, where Jesus stands to read and sits to teach. That was the custom, at least for advanced teachers.

Elementary teachers might stand to teach as well. But respected senior teachers would sit when they teach. I guess I'm an elementary teacher today.

Jesus' audience. Well, in 4:25 through 5.1, he's speaking to the crowds. In 7.28 and 29, clearly the crowds are listening to him.

But he's directly addressing in 5.1 and 2 the disciples. The implications that some find here, some say, is it is only for believers? Or perhaps only disciples can live it out. Ultimately, I think we have to take in mind what Paul also says in 1 Corinthians 5. He says, what do I have to do with those who are outside the church? The instructions I'm giving you have to do with those who are inside the church.

It's not our role to impose Christian disciple values in all of society, to tell a society, that you have to turn the other cheek if somebody makes war against you or something like that. Now, that may be the ideal, but if people aren't disciples, they're not going to live that way. But for us as disciples, well, the demands for us are higher because we are the ones who are really going to listen to what Jesus has to say to us.

Beatitudes, 5.3 through 12. It was common to have a poem to warm up the audience which was true in Greek rhetoric and Roman rhetoric. This may function in a similar way, but also it's a literary form that was common in the Old Testament.

You find it, for example, in Psalm 1, the beginning of Psalm 119. How blessed is the person, or how happy is the person, or how well it will be for the person who does such and such a thing. For, and then it describes the blessing.

That was a literary form. It continued in early Judaism. Sometimes you have it in the Greek world, but especially a Jewish literary form and rhetorical form.

The object of praise in the first four of these beatitudes begins with P in Greek. So, it's put in a way that would really hold your attention in Greek. And of course, the whole beatitude form in a Jewish context would hold your attention as a standard conventional rhetorical form.

The message of the Beatitudes seems to be quite counter-cultural. In the culture, there were some who wanted to bring in the kingdom by force. But the message here is the kingdom belongs to the broken.

The kingdom belongs to the humble and the lowly. The kingdom belongs to those who are hurting. So if you feel weak, sometimes in our lives, when we feel like we're at our weakest, in our most broken, is sometimes when the Lord is really closest to us.

And we can look back at those times and realize that we grew the most in our faith. Again, not because of who we are, but because of God's grace to us. So, coming back to how this message is lived out.

Remember, it's a summary. Well, it's fleshing out the summary in 4:17. Repent in light of the coming of the kingdom. Turn to God.

And this is how you should live to get ready for the future era because this is living out more of the lifestyle of the kingdom. Kingdom blessings. For example, the meek will inherit the earth.

Peacemakers will be called God's children. The merciful will receive mercy. The poor in spirit will receive the kingdom.

The persecuted will receive the kingdom. These are not the people who seize the kingdom by physical violence. These are the people who have to depend on God to protect them, to have their back, as we say in my language.

For a people prepared for the kingdom's coming, there's an inclusio. An inclusio is where you start and end with the same note. You say something similar both times.

Well, in 5.3 and 5.10, it says, theirs is the kingdom. So, these are kingdom blessings. These are blessings for those who will receive the kingdom.

And those in between flesh out some of what that involves. Comfort, for example. Well, in Isaiah, that was something eschatological.

That was something promised for the end time, that God's people would be consoled and comforted. And we have foretastes of that in Jesus' ministry in the present. For instance, the raising of Jairus' daughter.

In Matthew, it doesn't name Jairus, but the raising of the synagogue leader's daughter, brings comfort. But it's just a foretaste of the kind of comfort that God will



bring us in the coming age. In the same way, another of the blessings is that he'll satisfy our hunger.

Well, that again was an eschatological, an end-time promise, because Isaiah 25 speaks of a future banquet at the time of the resurrection. And you have that promise emphasized elsewhere, very developed in Jewish literature, the expectation of this final banquet. In the New Testament, he would satisfy his people's hunger in the New Exodus, the promised new age.

He would satisfy our hunger by providing for us, Revelation speaks of a tree of life with fruit that would bring healing to all the nations and so on. But Jesus gives a foretaste of that in his ministry, the feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of the 4,000. But someday we'll have that completely.

In the same way, we read that those who are merciful will receive mercy. Well, mercy was something you really wanted to have at the final judgment. But we get a foretaste of that.

Remember the people who cry out to Jesus, Lord, have mercy on me. And Jesus brings them healing. And also, the idea that they will be called children of God, those who obey these values, and they will see God.

Well, those things were associated with the first Exodus. But remember, Jesus does that in the present. Jesus calls his disciples his brothers and sisters.

These blessings were blessings that would come only by divine intervention. We have a number of divine passives that say things that will happen to the righteous. Well, how will they happen? These are blessings from God.

The meek will inherit the earth. That language is borrowed from Psalm 37. Now, in Psalm 37, the meek would inherit the land.

But by this period, Jewish interpreters often took kol ha-eretz, all the land, as all the earth, literally. And they believed that in accordance with some other Old Testament prophecies, God's people would inherit all the world, the world to come. And so Jesus presumably means it in that wider sense, that the meek, the ones who are often ground down by those in power now, the meek, the future belongs to them.

Prerequisites for the kingdom, for kingdom people. We don't try to force the kingdom on people who are unprepared for it. The kingdom doesn't come by violence.

It doesn't come by force. The kingdom is for those who wait for it, for the merciful, for peacemakers. Now, in Jesus' own day, this wisdom was vindicated in the year 70.

In the year 66, those who wanted to revolt against Rome said, no, Rome is treating us badly, which was true, and therefore God will be with us if we revolt. That revolt ended very badly with the destruction of Jerusalem, and the death or enslavement of most of the Jerusalemites and the people from the surrounding territory. Jesus' wisdom of peace was vindicated.

God favors the humble who don't trust in their own strength. The meek, probably using the earlier biblical phrase, the anawim, as we also see in the Dead Sea Scrolls and elsewhere, the poor in spirit, the broken, the lowly. Sometimes Jewish people associated that with religious piety, but especially it was being humble and not depending on ourselves, but depending on God.

We also see that these apply to those who yearn for God above all else, and who hunger for righteousness. You can remember in the Psalms, God, you are my God. Early will I seek you.

My flesh longs for you in a dry and weary land, or how the psalmist says, as the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs for you. People who hunger and thirst for God, people who hunger and thirst for righteousness, people who say, I can't make it without you, God. We're desperate for God.

God is near those people. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, Jesus says, will be filled. Sometimes that can be expressed with literal hunger, with fasting.

Fasting was often used for mourning. Sometimes people would be driven to this by mourning for their own sin or mourning over looking around at the sinfulness of the society around them and just mourning over sin. But whether with physical fasting or not, in Isaiah 58, the fast the Lord desires is working for justice.

But there's a yearning for justice. There's a yearning for God's will and God's purposes in the world because we know that's what's best for people. We can't force them to accept it, but we want that to be true because that's what we care about, because we know our Father has everybody's best interests in mind.

Mourning, Isaiah 61 speaks of God comforting the mourners, and God will comfort us. He will make a world in which only righteousness dwells. It also speaks of the pure in heart from Psalm 73, a psalm that goes on to speak of hoping in God alone.

These kinds of exhortations that Jesus gives us, these kinds of promises Jesus gives us with his beatitudes, challenge us as disciples in our daily lives, turning the cheek, loving our enemies. God must vindicate us. The climax of these beatitudes is persecution for the kingdom, 5, 10 through 12.

Jesus speaks of suffering for righteousness, suffering on account of me. The fact that he links these together is very significant. Suffering on account of me.

Elsewhere in Jewish literature you would have people talking about suffering for righteousness and suffering on account of God or God's name. So, Jesus here is being identified as divine. But here we have non-retaliation to the fullest extreme.

It's not just you don't strike back. It's that you rejoice when you're persecuted because you know that you have a great reward. Your interest is not in what people do to you.

Your interest is knowing how you stand before God and that God delights in you who are serving him with all your heart. And Jesus compares his disciples with the prophets of old because the disciples, like the prophets of old, are serving the Lord and declaring his message. But later on we'll see in 13:17, the Jesus' disciples are more than prophets.

Things that prophets desired to look into. We bear Jesus' name and so we have an advantage even over the Old Testament prophets because we have a fuller knowledge because we come after them, after Jesus is, after we know who Jesus is. Jesus himself is a model for these beatitudes.

He talks about blessed are the meek. Well, in 11:29 we see that Jesus is meek and lowly in heart. And in 21:5, for that matter, your king comes to you meek.

In 11:20 through 24, Jesus mourns over unrepentant cities. In terms of being merciful, well in 9:13 and 27 people ask for mercy. Jesus shows mercy to people in terms of being ridiculed the way the prophets were ridiculed.

Well, in 26:68 Jesus is being ridiculed as a false prophet. Ironically, in the context, he's being ridiculed as a false prophet even at the very moment that his prophecy to Peter is coming to pass. Jesus' behavior is an invitation to us.

The disciple is not greater than the teacher nor the servant than the master, Matthew 10:24 and 25. And so Jesus is the model for these beatitudes. He invites us to follow him, to be his disciples, to live out this lifestyle of the kingdom.

Well, how important is it to live out this lifestyle of the kingdom? We can see that in Matthew chapter 5 verses 13 through 16 where we read about salt and light. This defines our identity. You are the salt.

You are the light. The kingdom is not just about our behavior. It's about our character.

It's not just about what one does. It's about who one is. Those who don't live this kingdom way are like tasteless salt.

If we don't live out the values of the kingdom, if we claim to be disciples but we don't live like disciples, we're like tasteless salt or invisible light. Well, what would tasteless salt be like? Some people have compared the kind of impure salt that you could get around the Dead Sea where the other things would dissolve and there may be some value in that comparison. I think another comparison addresses this even more directly and that is where someone, possibly a Christian, came to a later rabbi toward the end of the first century, Rabbi Tarfin, and said to Rabbi Tarfin, what do you do with tasteless salt? What do you do with salt that loses its saltiness? He responded you salt it with the afterbirth of a mule.

Now, for those of you who didn't grow up on farms and are not biology majors, this was not meant to be taken literally because mules have no afterbirth. They're sterile. They cross between a horse and a donkey and therefore mules have no afterbirth.

And his point was, if you ask a stupid question, you get a stupid answer. What are you going to do if salt loses its saltiness? It doesn't lose its saltiness, but if it did, what are you going to do? Salt it? It's worthless. Throw it out.

And Jesus says it the same way with a disciple who doesn't live out the values of the kingdom. Well, are they really a disciple? They're worthless to the kingdom if they're not really a disciple of the kingdom. And the same with invisible light.

Well, what's the value of light that you can't see? Of course, today we know of the value of infrared and ultraviolet light. We can use it for things, but that's not what they were thinking of in this context. The examples Jesus gives are like, well, you put a lamp under a bushel or a peck measure and therefore you hide the light, you obscure the light so you can't see it.

Why even light it to begin with if it's not visible? He speaks of a city set on a hill. Well, they didn't have the kind of lighting that we have available today, but a city set on a hill with torches and so on would stand out in the countryside at night. Jerusalem was often called the light of the world, and so that would be a city set on a hill as well.

This echoes what Jesus says, you are the light of the world. He's echoing the light to the nations in Isaiah chapter 42, the mission of the servant, a mission that in Isaiah 49, we find out that one on behalf of the servant carries out. But just because Jesus fulfills that mission doesn't mean that the mission isn't still for God's people.

We are, as his disciples, supposed to carry out that mission too. We are to be the light of the world. But what good is a light that nobody can see? People have to be able to see the light and be changed.

But he says in 5.16, let your light so shine so people may see it and glorify your Father who is in heaven. And speaking of, in context, speaking of your good works, let them see your good works. But a little while later in chapter six in verse one, Jesus says, don't let people see your good works so that they may glorify you.

Well, should we let people see our good works? Or should we not let people see our good works? Here, Jesus is being a good Jewish sage, driving home the point, and using some paradox in the process. It's like in Proverbs 26, where it says, don't answer a fool according to their folly, lest you be like them. Ah, but do answer a fool according to their folly so they won't be wise in their own eyes.

Well, which is it? Answer them or don't answer them? Well, there's some truth in both, right? And there's truth in both that Jesus says here as well. But note the difference. Let people see your good works so they may glorify your Father.

Don't let people see your good works so that they may glorify you. The issue isn't whether people see your good works or not. The issue is the motive of your heart.

And that's something that nobody else can know, only you at best, and always your Heavenly Father. So, we need to live with him as our audience because he's the one who sees us when we're in private. He's the one who knows our thoughts when no one else is paying attention or can know them.

Even stronger words than this follow. If we have not been convicted yet, we may get nervous about this. 5:17 through 20, you must keep God's law.

In 5:17, Jesus says, I came to fulfill the law. I didn't come to destroy it. I came to fulfill it.

He said it won't pass away until heaven and earth pass away. That echoes sayings in the Old Testament and other Jewish sources. And Jesus uses the same phrase later on in Matthew 24, a way of saying, this is permanent.

This is forever. This is God's truth. 5.17, I came to fulfill the law.

5.18, not a single smallest stroke of the law will pass away. 5.19, keeping the least commandment makes you the greatest. Breaking it makes you the least.

And 5.20, your righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and the Pharisees, if you want to even be in the kingdom. Well, that may have scared some people,

because in terms of outward obedience, the Pharisees were the greatest model available in public. I mean, there were the Essenes who were stricter than the Pharisees.

And some people think that in the Dead Sea Scrolls when it speaks of speakers of smooth things, the Essenes are making fun of the Pharisees for being lax. But the Essenes weren't too much in public view the way the Pharisees were. How can our righteousness exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees? The Pharisees fasted two days a week.

The Pharisees tithed meticulously on everything in ways that we'll see about further as we go on. And if you look at their ethics, at least on paper, their ethics often resemble those of Jesus. How can our righteousness exceed that? Jesus is striking for the heart here because it has to be greater than any outward righteousness.

It has to go to the heart, a heart that only God can transform. Let's look at some of this in greater detail. 518.

Not the smallest yod, not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter will pass away. Well, the smallest letter in Hebrew was a yod. And there were other Jewish teachers who spoke about this.

And Jesus may be alluding to a wider, familiar story that people would have known. God took a yod from Sarai's name. When Sarai was changed to Sara, a yod was taken out of her name.

And that's in Genesis 17.15. And the rabbi said that this yod cried out to God from one generation to another, saying, God, you've taken me out of the Torah. You've disgraced me. When will you put me back in the Bible? How many of you think this is a true story? Anyway, as the story goes, this yod cried out to God from one generation to another.

But in the book of Numbers, Numbers 13.16, a yod was stuck in Hosea's name when his name was changed to Joshua, Yehashua. And so, the rabbi said, you see, not a single yod can pass from God's word. They also had another story where a yod was saying, God, King Solomon has uprooted me from the Bible, to which God responded, a thousand Solomon shall be uprooted, but not a single yod will pass from my word.

So, Jesus is alluding to this graphic image and saying, nothing will pass from God's word. This is God's word. It's forever.

And he was saying that about the Torah, about the law. And then in 5:19, if you break it, the least commandment, then you're least in the kingdom. If you keep it, you're the greatest in the kingdom.

Now, literally, it says great, but in this period of Koine Greek, great could be used for greatest. It's the same thing in Matthew 22, where Jesus speaks of the first and great commandment, literally first and great commandment, but we would naturally translate it first and greatest commandment. In any case, if you keep this least commandment, then you're the greatest in the kingdom.

So, what happens if you break it and you keep it on the same day? Average out in the middle. What happens if one person breaks it and you break it on the same day? Which one of you will be the least in the kingdom? This wasn't meant as a game for math majors to try to calculate exactly your standing in the kingdom. This was a graphic way of speaking.

You had this one rabbi who did something similar. He would come into class one day and he would say, this student over here, this is my most brilliant student. If this student were on one scale of the balance and the whole world were on the other scale, this student would outweigh the entire rest of the world in intellectual acumen.

The rabbi comes in the next day and points to another student and says, this student is so brilliant that if he were on one scale of the balance and the whole world were on the other scale, he would outweigh the rest of the world. Well, how can this be when this student over here, did they have a nocturnal brain transplant from this student to this student? What happened? It was just a graphic, hyperbolic way of reinforcing the point and gripping your attention. Well, when the rabbis spoke of the greatest and least of the commandments, I learned this from Robert Johnston, who recently retired from the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary.

He wrote a good article on this. Rabbis speak of the greatest and the least commandments. Well, the greatest commandment, many of them thought, was to honor your parents and you will live.

And that's not just some of the rabbis. The rabbis disagreed on which was the greatest of the commandments, but in this particular saying, they were saying, well, honoring parents is. Josephus also says that was the greatest of the commandments.

So, you can guess probably there were a lot of people who thought that back then. But they said the least of the where if you come along and find a bird's nest and you take the young out to eat, leave the mother bird behind. He said that's the least commandment.

But they noticed something. With both commandments, the Torah said, do this and you shall live. And the rabbi said, not just live long in the land, but live really long on the earth.

You will have eternal life. So that the reward for the least commandment and the reward for the greatest commandment, they said, is the same. And the punishment for breaking the least commandment and breaking the greatest commandment is also the same.

Well, what were they saying? The rabbis admitted that everyone sinned sometimes, even them. Their point was you can't pick and choose among God's commandments. You can't say, well, I won't murder anybody, but I'll have sex with somebody I'm not married to.

You can't pick and choose and say, well, I don't want to keep that commandment, but I keep the other ones pretty well. You must obey all of God's word. To cast off one piece of the law saying, well, I don't have to pay attention to that, was tantamount to casting off the whole yoke of the Torah.

And the rabbi said that was apostasy. Not that nobody ever sinned, but you can't say, well, I reject the law or part of the law. And yet Jesus says in 520, you must be more righteous than the scribes and the Pharisees.

The scribes being, well, you had village scribes who would just handle business documents. They were halfway literate, at least halfway literate, so they could execute business documents. But the scribes we read about in the Gospels are teachers of the Torah.

They might instruct children or they might be what we later call rabbis. They were people who were literate in the scriptures, in the Torah. The Pharisees were a particular school of thought that was very meticulous.

Josephus repeatedly describes them as being very meticulous, and very precise in their interpretation of the Torah. And depending on a whole tradition of interpretation with which the Sadducees didn't agree, but they were very much liked by the common people. They were very popular and very respected for their religious behavior.

Well, how can we be more righteous than the Pharisees? Jesus goes on to show us about that in the rest of the discourse. How? Well, the law says in 521, you shall not kill. The Pharisees would say, I don't do that.

But Jesus goes on in 522 to say, you shall not want to kill. The law says you shall not commit adultery. Well, Jesus quotes that twice in 527 and 31 and says in 528 and 32, you shall not want to commit adultery.



You shall not betray your spouse by an unfaithful divorce. So, Jesus goes to the heart of the law, not just how you behave, but who you are. And that's something people can't change on their own, no matter how hard they try.

That's something we need to be changed by God, receiving the kingdom like a child, depending on our Father who makes us new. He's the one that changes the heart. Six times, Jesus goes to the heart of the law of Moses.

Now, in each of these cases, the Pharisees would have agreed with him in principle. But remember, it's one thing to agree with Jesus in principle. It's another thing to submit to the yoke of the kingdom in the heart.

The law says don't murder. Jesus says control your anger. The law says don't commit adultery.

Jesus says don't lust. The law says don't commit adultery. Jesus says don't divorce.

The law says don't swear falsely. Jesus says have so much integrity that you don't even need an oath. The law says an eye for an eye.

Jesus says don't resist your enemies. The law says to love your neighbor. Jesus says love even your enemies.

The law limits sin, and that's what you expect. A civil law can just limit sin. It doesn't change the heart.

There's no way to enforce that. Although the law can address the heart, you shall not covet. But the law limits sin.

Jesus came to deliver from sin. The law informs us about right. But Jesus came to make sure that, as was always the goal, the law is written in our hearts so that Jesus doesn't just inform us, he transforms us.

5:21 to 48, he's basically giving midrashim on Old Testament text. He's expounding Old Testament text. He's saying, you have heard it said, what I say to you.

Well, he does say it with special authority when he says, amen, I say to you. But some people have missed something that was pointed out by Solomon Schechter at the very beginning of the 20th century. Solomon Schechter was a rabbinic scholar, and he pointed out that phrases like, you have heard it said, and phrases like, I say to you, are attested in the rabbis.

Other Jewish teachers used phrases like that. And when they said something like this, you've heard it said, but let me explain this to you in this way. You have thought it meant only this, but actually it has implications beyond that.

And that's what Jesus is doing. He's explaining the heart of the law. The rabbis often would make a fence around the law.

They affirmed kavanah, what they called kavanah, the intention of the heart. That was very important to them. But for the Torah, they tried to build a fence around the law.

So, they would try to figure out, well, how can we do this so we make sure we don't accidentally violate the commandment? And they would deal with what some later rabbis also called pilpul, discussions like, well, is it kosher? Is it permitted to eat an egg that a chicken laid on the Sabbath? You had to ask all these different kinds of questions to figure out, well, how can I make sure I don't accidentally violate the law? So, they'd be a little stricter than the law to make sure you don't violate the law. But Jesus approaches the fence, so to speak, in a different way. He doesn't go for the outward making sure you don't accidentally violate this or that precept of the law.

He goes for the heart. If we really long for God, if we really long for God's righteousness, what would a heart look like that really rejoices in this law, that really takes it to its fullest extent, that goes to the very purpose and heart of what God wanted the person to be expressed in this law? God cares who you are, not just what you do. Don't want to kill.

Don't want to commit adultery. Don't betray your spouse with an unfair divorce. Have more integrity than vows.

Avoid legal resistance. Actively love and help your enemies. And then in verse 48, just in case, we say, well, I have not broken any of that.

I've not broken any of those specific examples that you give. He says in verse 48, be perfect. And not just regular perfect.

Somebody might say, well, I haven't broken any of these commandments. I'm perfect. Jesus says, be as perfect as your heavenly father is.

And in case we thought that his examples were meant to be exhaustive, well, you know, he spoke of committing adultery in the heart, but he didn't speak of committing fornication in the heart, and I'm single, and the person I'm lusting after is single, so it doesn't apply to me. No. Be as perfect as your heavenly father.

In other words, this is a goal for all of us. It's not saying you have to have attained all of this already to make the kingdom, although you have to be better than the scribes and the Pharisees. You have to have a transformed heart.

But it's saying, still, this is a goal. We can always learn and grow more because of God's work in our lives. Well, looking at these, what are sometimes called antitheses, looking at the you've heard it said, but I say to you in more detail.

When Jesus says, you've heard it said, but I say to you. In Greek, there are a couple of ways you can say but. One is de.

De is a small but. Allah, instead, is a very strong but. It's a contrasting but.

Jesus uses a de here. He doesn't use a strong but. He uses a small but, which means you've heard it said, I say to you, not so much in contrast, but in development.

It's the same as what Paul does with Jesus' teaching in 1 Corinthians 7. This is what Jesus said. Now, this is what I say to you. The opening on man, however, is a graphic statement of authority.

It's not normally the way you preface your words. It's normally the way you conclude them. Jesus says the law says you shall not kill.

Jesus agrees with that but says if you really want to agree with the law, it goes further than that. If you're angry with your brother or sister, he says you're in danger of a crisis of judgment. If you call your brother or sister raka.

Raka, some people translate it as empty head. It means empty or void or void of worth, which I think is the point here. Good for nothing.

Call somebody, you're good for nothing. You're useless. You're worthless.

You call somebody raka, void. Jesus says you're liable to literally this sunedrin, the Sanhedrin, the council, the court, the Supreme Court. You call your brother or sister a fool, moreh, you are liable to the fiery gehenna or the hinnom, hell.

Now, is this increasing rank of sin and increasing rank of judgment going from judgment, maybe a lower court, to the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court, and then going on to being liable to hell? Is it that much worse to call somebody a fool than a worthless person? I think maybe these are all roughly equivalent, but these are just ways of saying the same thing. It's taken different ways. I'm not saying that you have to agree with my interpretation, but krisis, judgment, could mean God's judgment.

The Sanhedrin, I don't think it's the earthly Sanhedrin. The Supreme Court of Israel would not have tried anybody for the offense of calling somebody an empty head or calling somebody worthless. That was not an actionable offense for the Sanhedrin.

However, Jewish texts also speak of a heavenly Sanhedrin, a heavenly court, and that would make sense of this context, because Jesus goes on after this saying to speak in the following verses of, you know, if you're brought before the judge, well, he's speaking figuratively of the heavenly judge, and then all of that would be parallel to the fiery gehenna. You'll face judgment. You'll face the heavenly court.

You will face the fiery gehenna, and that's really scary the way he puts it because gehenna was already conceived generally as fiery anyway, so to call it the fiery gehenna means it's the fiery, fiery gehenna. Now, Jesus also warned against coveting others sexually. Among Gentiles, many people thought that was just absolutely normal.

Magical spells often would deal with how you could get somebody to like you if it was somebody you sexually liked. Well, Jewish people didn't think that was a good idea, especially Judean and Galilean Jewish people and further to the east, and Jewish women normally wore head coverings to prevent male lust because in the Mediterranean world, women usually covered up most of the rest of their body, so when you read about male lust, usually you read about men lusting after women's feet, their hands, or their head, but in the eastern Mediterranean and particularly in Jewish culture, the women would cover their hair. The hair had to be completely covered to prevent male lust.

Interestingly, Jesus does not blame male lust on the women in contrast to some other documents from this period. He says the man has to, I mean, we can all help each other, men and women can help each other by not dressing in certain ways, but the person who does the lusting is the person ultimately who's responsible for this. The penalty for this is hellfire.

Jesus speaks of it in terms of stumbling, which was often a phrase for apostasy back then, like in the book of Sirach. The moral principle here is the principle of marital and premarital fidelity. Being faithful to your spouse or your future spouse means you're not looking around at everybody else, and we see a positive example of that, I think, in Joseph controlling himself, and a negative example of that in Matthew 14 with Herod Antipas.

What are the solutions that are listed here for this sin? Well, the solution that we have specifically listed, Jesus says if your eye causes you to stumble, rip it out. If your hand causes you to stumble, tear it off. And so I usually say to my students looking around the classroom, I say, I can see that none of you have ever committed the sin of lust because all of you have your eyes.

And then they laugh, sometimes a nervous laugh. But if we compare the Jewish contemporaries, whoever looks for the purpose of coveting another's sexuality is guilty of the act. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, it speaks of this and elsewhere.

I was once visiting a synagogue, and the rabbi, who was a friend of mine, in very gracious terms, was explaining the differences between Judaism and Christianity. Now, he was a Reform rabbi, so keep in mind this is not like an Orthodox rabbi would not say something like this. But he said, one of the differences between Judaism and Christianity is that Christians believe lust is wrong, but Jews recognize there's nothing wrong with a little good healthy lust.

Well, I think he was thinking in terms of the Jewish teaching about the yetzir ha-ra, the evil impulse, where in Jewish teaching, well, if you didn't have at least some of that, you wouldn't have any libido, you wouldn't be able to reproduce. But I pointed out to him afterward, I said, actually, Jewish tradition does speak against lust. It's clear in the Dead Sea Scrolls, it's clear in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.

In fact, in the school of Rabbi Ishmael in the early second century, these rabbis said, well, if you stimulate yourself sexually, it's as if you've committed adultery. But I said, just in case you don't consider any of that Jewish enough, what about the Ten Commandments? The seventh of the Ten Commandments says you shall not commit adultery. But the tenth of the Ten Commandments says, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, as well as other things.

So, you know, you don't steal, don't covet those things either, but don't covet your neighbor's wife. In fact, when Jesus says do not lust, the word here is precisely the same word that's used in the Greek version of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Jesus is saying you shall not covet, you shall not desire your neighbor's wife. It's not talking about, oh, you happen to see something, a beautiful person of the other gender, the same way you would happen to see a tree and say, oh, that's a nice tree.

It's where you want to possess it for yourself. And that's something that isn't just a momentary appreciation. That's something where the person is meditating on it, thinking about it, desiring it.

Jesus says at that level, you've already committed adultery in your heart. And Jesus then goes on to talk about not betraying your spouse by divorce. And we will talk about that in the next section.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Matthew. This is session 7 on the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5.