

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 8, Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-6 6-min. Video Overview

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You know, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount has some of the most famous, and let's be honest, some of the most difficult teachings you'll ever hear. So how are we supposed to make sense of these radical demands? Okay, let's dive into this. We're going to use the incredible scholarship of Dr. Craig Keener to help us unpack what's really going on behind the words.

I mean, Jesus comes right out of the gate with statements like this. It's shocking, it's extreme, and right away it forces us to ask a really big question. Are we actually supposed to take these commands literally? Or is Jesus using a really powerful teaching tool to get at something much, much deeper? And that right there is the puzzle we've got to solve to understand this entire sermon.

Okay, so first things first. To get this, you have to spot the pattern that Jesus sets up right away. He consistently takes the law that everyone knew, which was all about outward actions, and he pushes it inward, to the heart, to our motivations.

He uses this incredible formula: you have heard it was said, but I say to you. Now he's not getting rid of the law against murder. He's going way deeper, right to the root of it: anger.

He's not just forbidding the act of adultery. He's targeting the lustful thought that comes before it. With every single command, he's shifting the focus from what we do to who we are on the inside.

Alright, let's put this idea to the test with a really challenging example. Jesus' teaching on divorce. This is where understanding his method is absolutely crucial.

So you hear that, and you think, whoa, okay, that sounds like an absolute, unbreakable rule. If you divorce your spouse and marry someone else, you're living in adultery. I mean, if you take that literally, almost every second marriage would be invalid.

But is that really what Jesus meant? And this is where we need our key for unlocking this whole thing: hyperbole. Now hyperbole isn't lying; it's a teaching style. It uses dramatic, over-the-top exaggeration to make a point you will never forget.

As Dr. Keener points out, it's a graphic way of grabbing our attention. Jesus used it all the time. So how do we know this divorce teaching might be hyperbolic? Well, there are some pretty big clues.

First, look at the context. It's right next to the command to pluck out your eye. I think we can all agree that's an exaggeration.

Second, Jesus himself, when talking to the woman at the well, calls her five husbands real husbands, implying those marriages were real and then dissolved. And finally, the Bible itself gives exceptions. There's an exception for unfaithfulness and another for abandonment.

And if there are exceptions, then the original statement can't be an absolute cosmic law. It's a powerful hyperbolic statement meant to show us just how seriously we need to take marriage. Alright, so now that we have this tool, this idea of hyperbole, let's see how it helps us understand another one of those famous commands.

An eye for an eye. But first, a little context here is super important. The law of an eye for an eye, or *lex talionis*, it wasn't a command to go get revenge.

It was actually a legal principle designed to stop endless escalating blood feuds. It was all about limiting retaliation, making sure the punishment fit the crime. It was actually a huge step toward justice.

But Jesus, he just blows right past that limit of justice. He gives three wild examples of how his followers should respond instead. A backhanded slap on the cheek? That was a massive public insult to your honor.

Jesus says, take it and offer the other. If someone sues you for your coat, he says, give them your shirt too, leaving yourself exposed and them shamed. If a Roman soldier legally forces you to carry his gear for one mile, Jesus says to volunteer for a second.

You see what's happening here? This isn't about being a doormat. It's a radical, active strategy. It's about choosing to overcome evil with a shocking, disarming kind of generosity that just shatters the whole cycle of revenge.

It says that your personal honor and your stuff, they're not nearly as important as the call to love. And all of this, it's all climbing towards the absolute summit of his teaching. The one that goes against every single natural instinct we have.

To love our enemies. Jesus sets up this really stark contrast. I mean, the way the world works is pretty simple, right? You love the people who love you.

You're kind to your friends. But Jesus says the model for his followers is God himself, who sends the sun and the rain on everybody. The good, the evil, the grateful, the wicked.

The standard isn't human fairness. It's divine, unconditional generosity. You know, Dr. Keener tells this incredibly powerful story about his own struggle with this.

After jihadists attacked his friends in Nigeria, he realized he couldn't even speak on this topic because he just hated them so much. He wrestled with God, arguing it wasn't practical to love them. But he realized the core issue wasn't about strategy.

It was about his own heart. The question was, was he allowed to hate or was he commanded to love? And this is how you do it. This is the practical application.

To love your enemy means to actively want what's good for them, and the most concrete way to do that is to pray for them. It is a profound act of rebellion against our own desire for revenge. So we've talked about lust, divorce, retaliation, loving our enemies.

What's the thread that ties all of these radical teachings together? Well, it all comes down to one final, huge principle. This is where Jesus pulls back the curtain and shows us the theme of the entire sermon. The ultimate test of righteousness isn't what you do on the outside, but why you do it on the inside.

Are you doing good deeds to be seen and praised by other people, or are you doing them for God alone? He gives three perfect examples. When you give to charity, don't metaphorically blast a trumpet to get everyone's attention. When you pray, don't stand on a busy street corner just so people will applaud you.

When you fast, don't put on a gloomy face so everyone knows how spiritual you are. In every single case, the righteous act done for public approval is worthless. The real value is in the secret act, the one that only God sees.

And this is the part that should send a chill down our spine. For those who do their good deeds for an audience, Jesus says they have received the reward in full. That's a term from ancient business.

It means the receipt has been stamped, paid in full. The transaction is over; there's nothing else coming. The fleeting praise of people is all the reward they're ever going to get.

So what's the big takeaway here? The Sermon on the Mount isn't a new, impossible list of rules designed to make us all feel guilty. It's more like a diagnosis. It uses powerful, exaggerated language to show us that the real problem isn't just our actions, it's our hearts.

The goal isn't perfect behavior, it's a complete internal transformation. And that really leaves us with one final question to chew on. If the true test of it all is our hidden motivation—the things we do in secret, our private thoughts, our unseen acts of kindness—if that's what truly matters, what does that change about how we live when we think no one is watching?