

# The Calling to Reconcile Before Worship (and Lord's Supper)

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**Bible Text:** Matthew 5:23-24  
**Preached on:** Sunday, February 11, 2024

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For the scripture reading this evening, we turn to Matthew chapter 5, and we read verses 17 through 26. This is the first chapter of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and if you remember from the bulletin last week, the sermon information in the bulletin is the same. So this was originally prepared last week as a preparatory sermon and I was intending this week to go back to James, chapter 3, verses 1 and 2 but then classes took place on Thursday, and after classes I thought I would just fall back on what I prepared for last week. So that's why we're looking at this passage tonight. I won't be here next week, so this is good for me too, two weeks in advance to think about coming to the Lord's Supper. Matthew 5, starting at verse 17.

17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. 18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. 19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. 21 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: 22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but [or, and] whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. [Treated in the preaching the different ways to understand that verse.] 23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; 24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. 25 Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. 26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

So far we read God's holy and infallible word.

The text for this evening is verses 23 and 24, and it will be profitable to keep our Bibles open as we look at this whole section. But the text is verses 23 and 24.

23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; 24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, as you know, as we prepare, when we prepare for coming to the Lord's Supper, there are three things that we have to consider when we examine ourselves. First, whether we know our sins, whether we know our sinfulness, and whether we know our need for a Savior. That first of all, Second, whether we are looking to Jesus Christ alone as the only and complete Savior who delivers us from all our sins. And thirdly, whether we truly purpose to show thankfulness to God in our whole lives and intend to walk uprightly before him. If you remember the language from the form for the Lord's Supper, it tells us to examine whether we have laid aside, unfeignedly, without hypocrisy, without faking, all enmity, hatred, and envy, and doth firmly resolve henceforward to walk in true peace, in true love and peace with our neighbor.

Before our sermon tonight, and as we're looking ahead to the Lord's Supper in two weeks, we're going to focus especially on that last idea. Are we firmly resolved to walk in true love and peace with our neighbor? That's a question for us to ask as members here at church. Are we united? Are we as members here at Grace characterized by true love and peace? Not just abstractly or formally, but in the heart in our relationships with each other, do we genuinely dwell in peace and love with the other members here at church? Do we truly love the other members? Am I judging others charitably? Am I careful not to hold grudges? Am I ready to make things right where they need to be made right? Or do I harbor bitter feelings towards others? Do I find it hard to shake hands with certain people in church or even to maintain a conversation with them? Or maybe this, do I tend to ignore others because I know they have a problem with me and yet I don't really care to have it resolved. In summary, is my attitude an attitude of true caring love for the other members in church, an attitude immersed in love? Or is my attitude an attitude of cold indifference where I am content with superficiality in church?

I think this is very important for us to look at because I think the temptation we face and what was actually happening in Jesus' day in the church was this, to just keep things on a superficial level and to not really care about the others around us. We're okay with not talking to others about broken relationships that we might have with them. We're okay with just acting. And maybe we're okay with saying, "Well, if someone has a problem with me, that's his problem, that's her problem and not mine. And if he wants to change it, he better be the one to do something about it." And what you get is division in a church, among families. What you get is people avoiding each other. Maybe you even get cliques

in church, cliques where certain people just can't get up and get to talk with another circle in the back of church because there's this unspoken rule that you don't talk in this circle and they don't talk in this circle and it becomes a breeding ground for bitterness in people's hearts, for schism, for pride, and for sin. And the danger is that the gospel itself, at least the enjoyment of the gospel, living out the gospel, starts floating away and the church loses its joy and its spiritual vibrancy.

Well here in Matthew 5 verses 23 and 24, Jesus is addressing this issue and he's addressing what we might consider to be a somewhat neglected issue. I say a neglected issue because I think we all know what we're supposed to do in a situation where we have something against another person, right? If we know someone is walking in sin, we go to them. Whether that be our spouse or our child or our cousin or our fellow church member, we go to them in the way of Matthew 18. We don't just wait for the elders to go to them. We go to them in true love. But here in the passage, Jesus is addressing something slightly different. Jesus says, "When you think that your brother has something against you, when you remember that there might be something that might be bothering another person about you and creating division, in those instances too, you go to your brother, your sister, and you seek reconciliation." Where there is unspoken tension, you reach out to be reconciled.

That's what we're looking at in the preaching tonight, "The Calling to Reconcile Before Worship (and Lord's Supper)." We look at three things. First, the urgent calling; second, the loving reason; and third, the divine possibility. To appreciate the calling that Jesus gives, let's look at the situation Jesus describes. At the beginning of verse 23, Jesus describes a man, an Israelite, bringing his gift to the altar and what Jesus is describing there is someone at the temple in Jerusalem bringing his gift to the altar to worship the Lord. And that word "gift" at the beginning of verse 23 is a general word for any act of religious devotion. So this gift could be an animal that the person is bringing to the altar as a sacrifice for sin, a sin offering for sins he has committed. Or it could be a kind of a grain offering, maybe some grain that he's ready to give as a thank offering. The word "gift" is a very general word. Either way, he's at the temple bringing his gift. He's maybe traveled a long way, maybe a couple days to be at the temple to offer his gift and now this man is waiting in line. Other worshipers are in front of him presenting their gifts, right? The temple is a busy place and this man is in line waiting his turn to speak to the priest. This was a very common experience in Jesus' day. His disciples listening to him preach on the Sermon on the Mount would have understood what Jesus is describing. This is a real thing.

But then Jesus says, as this man is waiting in line, and even as he's right there, he's right there, he's the next one to approach the priest, he suddenly remembers something. It comes, as it were, as a flash of memory, an image that suddenly appears in his mind. He's not been dwelling on it, right? It's not something that he's been stewing on, but it simply pops into his memory. It's really a memory that's unexpected and right at this present time, it's rather inconvenient that he remembers it because at just that moment, the man remembers that his brother has something against him. The man remembers that his brother hath ought against him and that word "ought" in verse 23 means "anything." It's a

very general word, a certain thing. Now notice again, it's not something you have against your brother, but it's something perhaps your brother has against you. You don't even know what it is, perhaps. Maybe you're completely in the dark, but you've sensed it. You know that there's something there, right? Maybe his handshakes are cold or distant, or she's avoiding eye contact with you and you're able to pick up by the body language that he or she has something against you. There's something there, but you don't know what it is. Or maybe it is something you do know about. Maybe it's something legitimate. Maybe it's a sin that you've committed against your brother. Maybe you stole something from him. Maybe you were angry with him, had a falling out with him, and said some nasty words. And maybe you're ready to put it behind you, right, because love covers a multitude of sins, but you know that he might still be hurting from it and there's clearly been a breakdown in the relationship.

So maybe it's something legitimate, and you know that you need to make it right. You need to pursue that. Or maybe it's not something legitimate. Maybe you know what it is, and it's something you did, but it wasn't sinful. Or maybe it was just something you couldn't even help, but the brother or the sister takes it personally and takes offense. You weren't really giving offense, but they took offense and you know there's tension there, and the brother or the sister thinks that he or she has a right to be dissatisfied with you. That's a possible situation. Maybe it's even this, maybe the brother or the sister, himself or herself, did something wrong and he's angry with you as a result. Now that might sound like a strange situation, but it happens. There's something that the brother has done against you or the sister has done against you and maybe she sees how embarrassing it was or how injurious it was, and now that something is the cause for his grief or her bitterness against you. Maybe he resents you. Maybe her sin has caused her to harbor hard feelings towards you.

The point is the situation Jesus describes here is very general. All Jesus says is this, if you are at the temple ready to give your worship and you remember that your brother or sister has something, anything against you, if you know that there is tension in your relationship with your brother, if there is not peace and reconciliation there, whatever the situation may be, you need to go to the brother and seek peace and reconciliation with the brother. That's the calling. "Leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift." And that word "reconciled" implies, as we just said, that there is division there. Two brothers, right? Your brother, thy brother. Two sisters, two brothers in Christ, two sisters in Christ, both saved by the grace of God, both forgiven their sins, both who have the love of God shed abroad in their hearts. They both know what grace is. They both confess that they're saved by grace alone. They're both members of one body, members of one another, but there's a divide. It's hard to talk to each other. There's distance. There's avoidance of eye contact. There's barriers, unspoken barriers set up. Jesus says be reconciled. Go to the brother. Go to the sister. Do what you can do to replace the enmity with peace, to replace the hurting relationship with a better relationship so that that barrier, that division is removed. You resolve the differences that divide you so that you can say, "We are brothers. We can shake each other's hands honestly. We can sit down together at a meal together right beside each other even at the meal of the Lord's Supper and have communion together."

That's the calling Jesus gives and what stands out about Jesus' instruction is the urgency of the situation. You're at the temple. Maybe you've waited in line for two or three hours. Maybe you've traveled two or three days to present your gift and you are right there. You're right there about to meet with the priest and then you remember that your brother has something against you. Go first to your brother. Leave there thy gift before the altar. Your animal that you're about to sacrifice, tell the priest that you need to tie it up against the wall. You've got to go somewhere right now. Your grain offering that you're about to offer, tell the priest you've got to leave it in the corner of the temple. You've got to go and deal with something. Leave it. Leave it and go thy way. First be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift. That's the urgent calling.

And one more thing, this is a very personal calling because in verses 23 and 24, Jesus is using the singular and that's coming out in the King James Version. "Therefore if thou," he uses the singular. Thou, not you. He doesn't say therefore if you, but therefore if thou. And so the point is Jesus is making this personal. This isn't just what people out there have to do. This is what I have to do. This is what the disciples of Jesus have to do personally. This is my calling, my personal calling.

Well, this calling that Jesus gives is very true to life, isn't it? These things happen. In church, among the saints, these things certainly happen. So there's tension. You come to church, you see someone, you know they have something against you. You come to church, you see someone, and they suddenly turn away from you and they talk to someone else. They avoid you. Maybe you're at the grocery store, and you cross paths, and they hardly acknowledge your existence, or maybe they don't at all. What's your responsibility? The temptation is to ignore them, isn't it? Maybe the temptation is to say, "Well, if he's got a problem, let him come talk to me. This isn't my problem. This is his problem." Maybe the temptation is to say, "Let's just avoid each other. Let's go to church and do our acts of worship and by our faithful attendance and participation in worship, we'll pretend like everything is well with us spiritually." Jesus says, "No. Go. Go thy way. First be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift. Don't keep going on with your worship. Stop your worship. Go to the brother. Seek him out and figure it out. Try to win your brother." And maybe that means you have to acknowledge your faults and you have to apologize and humbly ask for forgiveness and maybe seek to make amends. Maybe it means losing face, being embarrassed, perhaps appearing like a fool. No one likes to admit that they're wrong. Maybe it means picking up the phone and finding the phone number, reaching out by email, but maybe phone is better. Or just do whatever is needed to make right what you maybe did wrong. It might mean returning something that you stole, correcting the lie you told, reversing the gossip that you spread. Or whatever else is necessary. It does mean exercising great humility. It means going to your brother ready to listen, open to the idea that maybe you did do something wrong, and it means making sure you've dealt with your own sinful inclination to become bitter and resentful. And maybe, maybe it means the painful experience of ripping off that old band-aid in the relationship so that actual proper healing can take place among church members.

That's the calling and I would add, this isn't just our calling with our fellow church member, but this is our calling with respect to our spouse, with respect to our siblings, our parents, our extended family, our classmates, and others. How often don't spouses have arguments and then what happens? They're tempted to give each other the cold shoulder for a time. Or one spouse knows that the other spouse is distant from them, and then the spouse is tempted to say, "Well, that's not my problem. That's her problem, or that's his problem. I don't have a problem in my marriage. The other person has a problem in the marriage." That's straight up sinful. Siblings can speak cruel words to one another and then they leave the situation unresolved so that there's tension in the air.

There's all kinds of family dynamics and this is sometimes how people live. They know that their family member has something against them, maybe even something that's not legitimate but they know that their family member is bothered and dissatisfied with them, and then they have the attitude that Cain had towards Abel. "Am I my brother's keeper? That's not my problem. It's their problem." Jesus says, "Stop your worship. Don't give me your worship. I don't want your worship. Leave there thy gift at the altar and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift. Don't finish your devotions. Don't suppress the memory of your aggrieved brother or sister. Go. Yes, be careful. Prepare yourself spiritually for what you are about to do. Seek God's grace. Be motivated by love. Be humble. But go. Reconcile with your brother before next week, before worship." That's the calling. That's the urgent calling.

The question we should ask ourselves is this, why? What's the big deal? Why is this so important? Well, there are a few reasons that we could give. I have three before I say something else. First of all, you might legitimately be causing your brother or sister to stumble. We all need to be open to this reality that my brother or sister has something legitimate against me. And this is what humility looks like, I'm esteeming my brother better than myself. I need to go with an open mind, realizing that there might be something that I have done. Maybe even a good chance, right, and I need to be ready to repent and confess to God and confess to my brother or my sister. For that reason, I should be willing to go to my brother.

Second of all, this is my brother, my brother in the church. We're members of one another. This is what God has done. God has seen fit to make us members of one body and as members of one body, we've both been reconciled to God, and as members of one body, we ought to be reconciled to each other. Just think of how a parent is grieved to see his children living in bitterness and anger and he will not allow that kind of situation to continue. So it is with God when he looks down on his children, and he's grieved by it. This situation must not continue.

Third of all, even though things might be well with me, clearly things aren't well with my brother and so the thought that ought to enter our mind is this, he or she is at risk of falling into the snare of the devil. He's hurt. Maybe she's isolating herself, or he's bitter, or whatever it may be, and these conditions are making this person susceptible to the attacks of the devil. There's all kinds of temptations and spiritual hardships that arise when there isn't peace among brothers and sisters in the church.

These are a few of the reasons why we should go to the brother and perhaps we could keep going this way with specific reasons for why we ought to go to the brother, but in the end, it really boils down to just one thought and one word, love. Love. And that's expressed for us in the text. That comes directly in the text, verse 23, the very first word. "Therefore." Therefore. You see, this is exactly the issue Jesus is getting at in the whole Sermon on the Mount, and especially in this section. This is how love behaves. And I want us to spend some time on that; it will be profitable to have our Bibles open as we look at some of these things.

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is basically comparing the teaching of the scribes and the Pharisees with his own teaching. Back in verse 20, Jesus says, "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." And part of what Jesus is emphasizing there is this, the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is merely an external righteousness. It's a surface righteousness. So that according to the Pharisees, as long as you don't actually physically murder someone, you've kept the Sixth Commandment. So as long as you don't actually commit the physical act of adultery, you've kept the Seventh Commandment. And Jesus in this section is saying, "No, that's not the law at all. The law goes deeper. The law is not to be limited to mere outward behavior. The law has to do with the heart." That's why we sang that first number. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear my prayer. These things have to do with the heart.

And so Jesus goes on in verse 21 to explain himself, what he wants to teach his disciples. He says, verse 21, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment." Jesus is saying that's how your fathers taught you the law. Do not kill. And now there's nothing strictly wrong with that, but the situation was this, the Pharisees were saying, that's all that the law requires. That's why later on, the rich young ruler can come to Jesus and in all sincerity say, "I have kept the law from my youth up." But Jesus says in verse 22, he goes on and says, "But I say unto you this," and Jesus is going to show us what the law really requires, what righteousness truly looks like, not the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. "But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment." Jesus says that's the reality. If you have anger against your brother, bitterness against your sister without cause, you're worthy of death. Having an unloving, ill-natured attitude towards a brother or sister is actually sin against the Sixth Commandment and deserves to be punished with death.

That's what he's teaching there at the beginning of verse 22 and then Jesus goes on and he says, "and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." And the wording here, in my mind, is a little confusing. There's two ways to explain verse 22, the last part of it. The first way is like this, whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, which means empty-head or bonehead, shall also be worthy of being punished with death. And, so you change

the King James where it says "but" and you change that to an "and." It's the same word in the Greek. And whosoever shall say thou fool shall be in danger of hellfire.

So the first way to understand verse 22 is to say that all these phrases are parallel sentences. You have an ill-natured attitude towards someone, you call them names, you call them Raca, bonehead, or you call them fool, moron, in all these cases, you are worthy of death and judgment. So these are parallel phrases. The second way is this, whosoever shall say to his brother Raca shall be in danger of the council and the possible understanding of that is this, that in Jesus' day, the Jews had a rule that you couldn't use the word Raca. So the Jews were very legalistic, right? Of all the words that you couldn't call your brother or sister, this was the forbidden word, Raca. You can call them all kinds of names, but you can't use the word Raca because if you use the word Raca, then you are in danger of the council. But then Jesus says, but I say unto you, that whosoever shall say, you fool, just to say that, you fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. And the point would be this, judgment is not just limited to the use of the one word Raca, but even if you use the word moron or idiot or fool, you're worthy of hell fire. So that's the second way to interpret verse 22 and this is what was going on, right? It's like crossing your fingers behind your back. Then you can swear an oath because my fingers are crossed. That's what Jesus goes on to address in the next verses, or I'm just lusting after a woman. I'm not actually committing adultery. Just lusting after her. No, Jesus says, let's get to the heart of it.

So Jesus is emphasizing the law goes much deeper than what the Pharisees were teaching but then in verse 23, Jesus continues with still more and Jesus says not only is there that negative, don't be angry with your brother without cause, but there's also the positive. Love your neighbor. Do him good. Or as the Heidelberg Catechism puts it, show patience, peace, meekness, mercy, and all kindness towards him and prevent his hurt as much as in you lies. That's what Jesus goes on to teach in verse 23, 23 and 24.

And what does that look like in practice? Well Jesus gives an example. "When you are bringing your gift to the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and go your way. Go thy way. First be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift." Love. Love. That's the Sixth Commandment. That's what the kingdom of God looks like. That's what the Sermon on the Mount is all about, the citizens of the kingdom of God. That's the mark of the one who is a citizen of the kingdom of heaven and that's when your righteousness is going to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Now, this is not teaching that we get to heaven because we do these things. This is not to say anything about how we need Jesus' righteousness alone as our righteous standing before God but Jesus is saying this is what is right in the eyes of God. This is what his law requires. The righteousness of the Pharisees is a sham. This is what is righteous in God's eyes, love your neighbor as yourself.

And how does love act? Well, we know how love acts. Love does not seek her own. Love is a choice that you make to do something, to act a certain way. Love is kind. Love is patient. Love does not envy. Love does not puff itself up. Love does not behave itself



unseemly. Love thinks no evil. That's why if you need to, you're going to call your brother up this week and maybe this is the advantage of having two weeks, you're going to call your sister up this week and have a phone call, or you're going to sit down and have a talk because you love him, because you love her. I don't want my brother struggling at church. I don't want my sister struggling at church. And if I need to apologize for something legitimate, and it's a stumbling block to my brother or my sister, if I have love for them, then I want to make this right. Let's clear this up.

That's true in church. That's true in our families. That's true in our marriages. If you are loving your family member, children, your brother or your sister, you want to do them good. You care. And for us who are older, then we don't say, "That's his problem. If he wants to hold a grudge against me, if she wants to hold a grudge against me, then let her. That's not my problem." That's murder, beloved, and if that's where you are at, and if that's where I am at, then we're not ready for worship, and we're not ready for the Lord's Supper. And beloved, if that's where I am at in my own heart, if that's where you are at in your own heart, then we're no different than the Pharisees. You go through the motions. You eat together at one table, the table of the Lord, acting as if there's table fellowship, but it's not true and that's why Jesus says, don't first give your worship. First seek out your brother because if you don't have love in your heart, your worship, your gifts to the Lord mean nothing.

Now that doesn't mean that everyone is going to be the friendliest to each other. We understand that there's the reality of history. There's consequences for sin, maybe broken trust, relationships having to take time to be rebuilt. We don't simply forget things that happened in the past. That's not reality. That wouldn't be wise either. And even after maybe a talk this week, it still might not be the way that it was at one time in your life. But nevertheless, there's this true disposition of love and care and goodwill and you act on it. And if there's still a struggle in your heart, still a struggle in my heart, and you see that you still have to battle against these thoughts of judgmentalism, but you truly wish they were gone, well then still come to the Lord's Supper and be strengthened by the means of grace as you continue to pursue that more excellent way, the way of love, the path that pleases the Lord. That's why I'm here at the Lord's Supper because I'm seeking these things and I'm seeking strength to continue to pursue these things.

Love. It's the loving reason. Love is the reason we seek out reconciliation, but then there's something more to add as well and this is the bridge from the second point to the third point of the sermon. This is both the reason why we carry out the calling and it also is the possibility for doing what Jesus is calling us to do and that's this. Why do we seek out reconciliation? Because I know God's love towards me and that's where it starts. You're at the temple. You're ready to worship. And who are you about to worship? You're about to worship the God of all grace and love and mercy and kindness and all good things. You're about to worship the one who sent his only begotten Son to die for you and your sins. You're about to worship the God with whom you had a problem. You had a problem with God. I had a problem with God. We were children of wrath. I was once hating God. And what did God do with you? What did God do with me? Did God say, "Well, that's his problem. I'll wait till he comes to me before we figure this out." Thanks be to God,

that's not what he did. If that was how God acted, we would never be reconciled to God. No, but he came to us. He acted according to how love acts, because he is love. And look at how much it cost God to come to us. so that we might be reconciled to him. He was not at fault. We were the sinners and he came to us and showed us mercy. He came and did everything it took so that we might be reconciled to him. It took him coming in the flesh, dying on the cross, going through hell, it took him unspeakable humiliation and suffering and shame, but this is how he showed his love for us.

Now we know we can't sweetly bend people's hearts in the same way that God sweetly bends our hearts, but nevertheless we leave that to God and then we follow God's example, his example of love, and we go to the brother, to the sister, in the same spirit of love that God had for us and we pursue love. It doesn't always mean reconciliation. Reconciliation doesn't always happen but among brothers and sisters in Christ, as far as reconciliation goes, there should be no reason why reconciliation shouldn't happen understanding what reconciliation means. But we pursue the more excellent way of love nevertheless. That's the reason for going to the brother, I know God's love for me. And that's also the possibility for going to the brother because I know God's love for me. God has made us his children. We've been reconciled to God through the blood of his Son. I have his Spirit, the spirit of love in me and this is how I now live as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven.

Beloved, may the Lord give us the strength and grace to pursue his will. And as a congregation, as a body, and in our homes and families and in our own personal walk with the Lord, may we enjoy his smile and his favor upon us as we seek his way, the more excellent way, the way of love. Amen.

Let us pray.

*Our Father, these things make us happy to reflect on Thy love for us, and to experience that love in the congregation. What a hardship it is, Lord, when we're not experiencing that love in fellowship. What a snare of the devil. What a distraction from worship and how it robs us of our joy. Out of love for our brothers and sisters, Lord, give us this disposition to seek each other out before worship so that our worship itself might be in love and in the spirit and sincere and enriched as we know that we're coming as one body, one family, with one mind, we're coming in love as a family before Thee. Help us, Lord. Here on the earth below, things are so far from perfect and we struggle. Give us wisdom. Give us faith to trust Thy Word and give us the grace that we as disciples might heed this instruction and follow it. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*