

Sermon on the Mount 5

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors:

The Golden Rule (7:1-12)

We have been looking at sections of the Sermon on the Mount and we need to do that to see the issues that Jesus raised in His teaching. It can be like looking at the individual tree in the woods. We get a fair idea of the teachings in this way. In this last study, I like to stand back and look at the big picture of this Sermon on the Mount.

Last week, I highlighted these verses.

²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³ but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! (Matt. 6:22-23)

It is the way we see things. It is the way we interpret the data we have received. The same data can be interpreted as good or bad depending on which side of politics you are on. I also mentioned last week that when grace is shown it does not always bring about a response of gratitude. The opposite response of resentment and anger can arise when grace is shown. But that does not mean that we do not act in grace to others. If we don't then we are allowing the anger of the other to dictate what we should do. That is to lose our way and we do not know who we really are and what we are really doing.

Firstly, we have seen that Jesus started the teaching here with the blessings of God and it sets the tone of His teachings here. The blessings of God are what God has given to us and not what we do to get them. If we don't get this right, then our whole thinking will be skewed. We won't get anything right after that.

Jesus then goes on to teach that worship, which is also the way we live, is not about the external actions but about the transformation of the heart, ‘for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (6:21). This transformation is not something that we can develop ourselves. It is the work of the Spirit of God within us. These are the two twin pillars in our understanding of the Sermon on the Mount.

‘Judge not that you be not judged’

These words from the Sermon on the Mount are well known to most people even though they may not know where they come from or what the context is. These verses are often taken out of context and used in a defensive manner to protect the person quoting them. So, if I were to tell someone what is wrong, then the response from the other person is to tell me not to judge. In certain situations, the response is not wrong.

However, there are certain things that are right and certain things are wrong. If we were to make a statement regarding those issues, are we not making a judgment? There need to be judgment. The modern generation may want to live in a judgment-free society and indeed this is the trend. There cannot be a judgment free society. So, are we not allowed to make any judgment? If we do then we are judged to be narrow and intolerant. Our modern society insists that there is no right or wrong. It is all a difference of opinions and all opinions are valid. There is an error in this logic. In other words, we must be tolerant to all opinions except that which is different to mine. It is an extreme form of self-centredness.

Jesus Himself made judgments of the situations as He saw it. He cleared out the temple. But we say that He is God and it is alright for Him to do that, but not with us. However, the prophets of old made judgment of Israel. The classic example is the prophet Nathan passing judgment on King David after his adultery and murder. Again, you may say that that is a clear-cut situation because David had

transgressed the commandments. So obviously, what Jesus is trying to teach here is not that we cannot make a judgment, but that there are premises to making judgment.

The First Premise

² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

What Jesus is saying is this. If we make a judgment according to certain criteria, then those same criteria apply to us as well.

The Second Premise

³ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

There need to be a self-assessment before we make that judgment. In other words, the first judgment has to be on ourselves. In Jesus' judgment on the woman caught in adultery, He said, 'Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her' (John 8:7).

What Jesus is saying here is that we all live under grace. No one has to do exactly what the other think we ought to be doing, i.e. within reasonable boundaries. We can see the actions, but we are not able to see into the heart. We do not know the full intention unless we are told. Even then the stated intention may not even be true. The warning here is that we must not be too ready to make a judgment because we often do not have all the facts. We may have some of the facts but not all the parameters of the situation. Furthermore, each of us is still a sinner and we need to be aware that our judgment and opinion may not be right.

Samuel was told how he should judge.

⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." (1 Sam. 16:7)

What Jesus is teaching us in this section is not that we do not make any judgment at all, but in making a judgment, let us be conscious of our frailty and indeed we are all locked into our sins had it not been for the redeeming love of Jesus on the cross. In making a judgment we need to be aware that because of the cross and the coming of the Spirit of God, He now indwells us and indeed will lead us into the truth. We do not relate to another in a direct way, only through Christ. If our lives are lived in the Spirit then the Spirit of God leads and directs our lives. We need to respect the ways of the other even though we may not fully understand it.

Ask, Search, Knock **Ask and you shall receive**

⁷ "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?"

We will now look at the teaching on asking and receiving. Most people understand this as it is said here, 'Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you'. What could be simpler? You don't need a degree in English to understand this and all we need to do is to ask. We do this in prayer, and if we pray hard and long enough, God will answer you. This is the popular understanding and what is so different from other religions? Well if the request is not granted, then this is because we do not have enough faith. As Jesus has taught, if we have enough faith, we will be able to move even mountains (Mt. 17:20). So, when the prayer is not answered, then the problem is

thrown back onto the person. The person then develops a guilt response. Well, my prayer is not answered and this is because I don't have enough faith. The person then feels inadequate because he or she has been made to feel that there is not enough faith for God to answer. What more can I do to have greater faith, the person asked?

There is a problem with this interpretation. Who holds the final trump card for the prayer to be answered? Answer: the person who makes the request. In this sort of interpretation, humanity holds all the trump cards in hand. In this framework, the answer is dependent on the faith of the person. Faith leads to the answer of the request. No faith, no answer. Humanity then controls the answer. If that is the case, is our God then the sovereign God? Or is He a merely a servant to humanity?

Yes, this is contractualism. There is something that humanity does, and God will do something in response. You scratch my back and I will scratch yours. This makes God's grace dependent on what humanity can achieve. Jesus made this comparison.

¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

This is not a comparison of equals. 'How much more' says that God will do even more than what we humans can comprehend and that is his covenant love.

The Blessing of Creation and Redemption

We need to say a few things about God and what He has given to His creation before we go on. The blessing of God to His creation is His enabling to them in order for them to live as He has ordained in His creation. Peter confirms this in his letter.

³ His divine power has granted to us **all** things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. (2 Pet. 1:3-4)

God has given everything for humanity to live as He has willed. God has not withheld anything from humanity that is conditional on good behavior.

The Principle of Discovery

How are we to make sense of what is said elsewhere in scripture and what Jesus has taught here? Is there a contradiction here? Apparently, there is. I know that this is a difficult one for us to hold together, i.e. God has given us everything and Jesus teaching that when we ask we will receive.

What I am going to say here is not derived from scripture. I am proposing a principle here and that is the principle of discovery. I think this is a very important principle in our thinking without which we may be totally confused.

Let me start historically. When Christopher Columbus proposed that one can travel west in order to get to the east, he was ridiculed. To us that is simply the way the world is, but in those days the world was thought to be flat and if you do that, you might just fall off into the abyss. Christopher Columbus discovered a new principle that the world is spherical. That was the point of discovery. The world is always spherical or close to that. God has created planet earth that way. Humanity was simply unaware of that because they had looked at things from their perspective and they had no other revelation until the astronomers pointed things out. The astronomers had a special instrument. They had a telescope. That helped them to see. All of us can understand that. Now our prayer requests to God follow a similar principle.

God has given us all that we need to relate with Him. He did that in creation. God has not given us only a certain percentage and depending on our response, He will give something more. That is contractualism at its worst. Our God is the covenant God of love. He has given us all. If we look at that from our perspective, then we will be very short sighted. That is the bad eye that we have. We need the aid of the Spirit of God to see the things of God. We need to see things through this 'telescope' that God has given us. We cannot try to understand the things of God simply through our intellect unaided.

The point of discovery is not the point of giving. God has already given. God has given me all that I need to honour Him. My error is in hanging on to my past and not to acknowledge His presence.

What should we be Asking and Searching?

Before we answer this, we need to speak on the creational purpose. What is humanity created for? Answer: it is for communion with the Creator and to enjoy Him forever.

Jesus is not teaching about getting rich or getting in the university course of your choice. He is talking about our relationship with God. Remember, He started with the blessings that God has given to us. For what purpose? So that we can be in communion with God – the restored communion.

So, what should we be asking? Answer: A revelation of who God is. That is the starting point in all our prayers. When we are locked into the comfort of our culture we will be blinded to the reality of the life in the Spirit. Where our treasure is, there will be our heart also. When we are hampered by our past hurt and resentment, we won't be able to move as the liberated people of God. Those issues in the past impede our movement and that is why we need the forgiveness from Christ at the cross and the freedom of movement in the Spirit.

Don't treat God like a container of goodies. We come to it to get what we want. He wants us to be in Him enjoying all the goodness He has given to us. Our prayers and our asking must be directed to this end. That is what Jesus meant when He taught, 'ask and you shall receive'.

The Golden Rule

¹² "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

This text is commonly called 'The Golden Rule'. Many people know this rule, but most of them do not where this has come from. It may seem unnecessary to speak on this as most people know this well. In fact, they may even have applied it to many of life's situation or even taught it. I need to say at the outset that I am not speaking here on ethics, but on the Word of God and that is to speak on Christ. This rule is mostly used in matters of ethics, but as you know Jesus is not here teaching ethics, but the Kingdom of God.

The Golden Rule is also found in many other cultures, eg. Confucius stated this, but in a negative form.

CHAP. XI. Tsze-kung said, 'What I do not wish men to do to me, I also wish not to do to men.' The Master said, 'Ts'ze, you have not attained to that.' (Analects, Book V)

The rule is stated in the negative as in here and this is often referred to as the 'Silver Rule' as against the 'Golden Rule'. Since this Golden Rule is present in so many cultures, why is Jesus teaching it here? Has He borrowed this from other cultures? Of course not. If it is, then He would not be the Creator Sovereign God that He is. But this teaching existed before the time of Christ, in fact centuries before. Even Confucius teaching was two centuries before Christ. There are many questions here in order to understand this teaching as Jesus intended.

We need to make one principle before trying to understand this and that is the principle of the context. The question we need to ask is why is this put at this juncture of the Sermon on the Mount right after the section on 'Asking and Receiving', and also towards the end of the Sermon. In fact, this is the last of the teaching. After this, from verse 13, is the conclusion and summary of the Sermon on the Mount.

This is the last of Jesus' teaching here and He says, 'In everything' as if to summarise all that has been taught, 'do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets'. In other words, Jesus is here ending His teaching and He is saying something like this. 'Now, after all that I have taught you here, in everything, do to others as you would have them do to you.' Jesus is not here setting out an ethical precedent, but that this is the life in the Kingdom of God. This is how we all should live in God's Kingdom. This saying is not about ethics, but about the relationship in the Kingdom of God.

One way of looking at this is to interpret it in the context of self-interest. This is a popular way of understanding this. But is self-interest the context of Jesus' teaching here? Answer: A firm no. Why? Because self-interest leads to conflicts unless all the individual selves are in perfect harmony. So, if my self-interest is different from yours, whose interest should prevail. You now have a difficult problem. How do you apply this rule then? If you follow this rule because of self-interest, what if your action is not reciprocated? What do you do then? Continue as you are or give up and not do it? Most would finish up one way or the other. Or you may continue to do it grudgingly. Neither of these is what the way Jesus wants us to live. That is not the life of the Kingdom. Therefore, this is not the way of understanding the teaching here.

Our problem in understanding the things of the Kingdom of God is that we are not linked to the King of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is not a thing or a territory. It is not even the church. It is the King. The King is not merely the King of the Kingdom. The King is the Kingdom. If we can get our heads around this, then we would have come a long way in understanding the things of God.

Jesus is saying that this is the way things are in the Kingdom of God. It is not self-interest. It is not about reciprocity or contractualism. It is relating the way it should be with the people of God. It is about the care of the other, the acknowledgment of the other as the child of God. It is the expression of love because God is love and we are the people of love.

Finally, there is a fallacious and dangerous assumption with the common interpretation to this teaching which is contrary to what Jesus meant. That is the assumption that what I consider as good is good. The assumption is that we humans are able to determine that which is good and to do that which is good. What if I do not mind having my car wrecked by dangerous driving and I do that to your car? That would not be consistent with this teaching here as we know that is not right.

Notice that there is also an addendum to this saying. Jesus added to this saying, 'for this is the law and the prophets'. What are the law and the prophets? They are the revelation of God to His people. And what is the purpose of this revelation? Answer: So that the people of God may turn to Him and be in communion with the Creator God.

As I have said, the point of this saying is relational and not ethical. It is the relationship with the King of the Kingdom and living with the people of God in the Kingdom. This life is governed by the Spirit of God in our love for and acknowledgment of each other. It has nothing to do with self-interest or any contractual arrangement. It is relating in love.

So, the Sermon on the Mount begins with the blessings that God has given to His people and the way His salt and light reflect onto the people. Then Jesus went on to relational issues such as murder, adultery, contractualism (an eye for an eye) and the love within the community. Jesus then went on to talk about the attitude of the heart against the external deeds as in giving, praying, fasting and storing. Then it is the concerns of life and He went on to assure us that God has already given. We only need to ask and that is the point of discovery.

**Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from Evil:
Build your house on the rock (Mt 7:13-23)**

The tree and its roots

The Sermon on the Mount is not about what you do, but about the relationship in the Kingdom of God. It is about being linked or related to the King of the Kingdom. It is about living in the Kingdom of God. It is giving to the other the freedom that the gospel of Jesus Christ has given to us. It is the acknowledgment that the other is living under the rule of the Lord as we are living under the rule of the Lord. My life may not be perfect at this stage or at any stage, but the Lord will get me there in His time. It is acknowledging this as we live together in God's Kingdom.

Thus, the analogy to the tree and its roots.

¹⁵“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

A tree survives by its roots, its life-line. Our life-line is Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is only through them that we have life and have it abundantly. We cannot do otherwise. Why must this be so? Jesus precedes this with the warning of the false prophets. They deceive us and seek to sever the very roots of our survival.

Words and Deeds

²¹“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

In the fourth verse of the song, ‘I know not how to pray’, it says, ‘Spirit convincing me of pardoned sin’. Do we pray for forgiveness of our sins, i.e. our sins are not forgiven until we ask, or do we pray for the Spirit to convince us of pardoned sins? Therein lies the difference between one who is outside the Kingdom and one who is within the Kingdom. It depends on where you are. One knows who he/she is while the other does not.

We come to the last of what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. The last words are often the most important words. We have a difficult passage to explain this morning. Why is it that there are some who call Jesus Lord will not enter the Kingdom of heaven? That includes those who even do what appear to be the work of God. It does not sound right to us. My task this morning is to explain this. In doing so, I need to reset the gauge we have in our minds. I hope with the aid of the Spirit, this may happen.

Before I try to answer that, we need to introduce two terms, ‘being’ and ‘doing’. ‘Being’ refers to who one is. ‘Doing’ refers to what one does. ‘Being’ is creational, while the ‘doing’ is the result of the creational, i.e. what God has created. This is an important point of differentiation. It is the difference between being and doing. What I do is because of what I am. It is not what I am because of what I do.

So why can't I call Jesus ‘Lord’ and enter the Kingdom of God. This is the difference between the ‘forgiven’ and the ‘unforgiven’. The problem is our sin. Forgiveness is the work of God in us. The bible calls it a ‘new creation’. Just as creation is a work of God, so the new creation is also a work of God. This is our new being – a re-created person. ‘If anyone be in Christ, he is a new creation’ (2 Cor.

5:17). As one who is forgiven, we do not continue to ask for forgiveness, but the Spirit of God assures us of the forgiveness, i.e. convincing us of pardoned sins as the hymn goes.

Now we can go on to make a few more statements.

1. The imperative does not precede the indicative, but follows from it and is dependent on it. The indicative dictates the imperative which is the inevitable result of it.
2. Our preoccupation with the imperative makes it easy for us to be deceived.
3. If we struggle with the imperative, which we all will from time to time, the answer lies not with more effort on the imperative, but with more time with the indicative.
4. The indicative has been accomplished. We need to know what has been accomplished, i.e. the indicative, so that we can pursue the imperative with joy.
5. Pursuit of the imperative results from the dwelling Spirit within us. That is the dynamics of the new life in Christ.

The ‘doing’ does not come before the ‘being’, but follows from it and is dependent on it. The ‘being’ dictates the ‘doing’ which is the inevitable result of it.

This is a complicated statement. Let me explain this simply. An animal bark because it is a dog. I may bark but that does not make me a dog. Put in another way. A person goes to church because he/she is in Christ. Just because a person goes to church, that does not make the person a Christian.

What this is saying is that there is a creational act that makes a thing or a being what it is. That is the ‘being’. A watch tells the time, but a sundial can also tell the time, but it is not a watch. There is something specific about the creation of a watch that makes it a watch. In the same way, there is something specific in the new creation that makes the person a Christian. And because the person has been re-created as a Christian, that person does certain things. Any other person doing the same things may not be a Christian.

The new creation is not because of what we have done, just as we do not determine our birth. Our new creation comes about through the death of Jesus on the cross. His death conquers evil and our sins. He has borne our sins on the cross. Through this the Father has forgiven us. This is our new creation. That is why Jesus is the gate through whom we can come to the Father.

Our preoccupation with the ‘doing’ makes it easy for us to be deceived.

Just because I bark, you think that I am a dog. You are deceived. When we are preoccupied with the ‘doing’, we make ourselves wide open to invite in wolves in sheep clothing as we have said last week.

If we struggle with the ‘doing’, which we all will from time to time, the answer lies not with more effort on the ‘doing’, but with more time with the ‘being’.

This is the Christian pitfall. The world tells us to try harder and harder, work harder and harder to get to where we want to be. You cannot transfer this to the new creation. We will struggle with doing the right thing, but the resolution does not come from our works because the ‘doing’ follows from the ‘being’. The answer is to dwell on the ‘being’, i.e. to know what God has done for us.

The ‘being’ has been accomplished. We need to know what has been accomplished, i.e. the ‘being’, so that we can pursue the ‘doing’ with joy.

God had done it all for us. The new creation has been accomplished by Jesus on the cross. This brings great joy to us as we pursue the doing. Jesus invites us to come through Him, the gate.

Pursuit of the ‘doing’ results from the dwelling Spirit within us. That is the dynamics of the new life in Christ.

God has not done His new creation and left us to run along on our own steam. He has given to us His Spirit who indwells us and this is the driving force behind our new life. We are not on our own to prove that we are deserving of His grace. The Spirit dwells within us and this is the dynamics of the new life in Christ. That is to say that the ‘being’ is a matter of the new creation.

So, when the words, ‘Lord, Lord’ comes from our lips through the Spirit of God, then we are in the Kingdom of God.

Build right, stand firm

²⁴“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

This last saying in the Sermon sums up the discourse already given. It is linked to the saying on the tree and its roots (6:17-20). It is also about the Kingdom in the person of Jesus Christ. That is the foundation on which we build. The firm foundation in Christ is contrasted with the shifting sand of current opinion, which one day says that fats and lipids are bad, and another day, it shifted to sugars and carbohydrates. This is also the fads which the false prophets bring, the excitement of the spectacular.

²⁸And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, ²⁹for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

Look not for the spectacular and what impresses us. Stay with the one who has authority, authority over us and authority to bring us to the Kingdom of heaven.