

# ☒ LIFE OF JESUS

April 11, 2021 | *The Sermon on the Mount Part 1*

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

- Write down what is considered the “good life” in our culture.
- Write down what you consider to be the good life.
- Read Matthew 5 (if you are feeling ambitious, read Matthew 5–7 to gain a full picture of the Sermon on the Mount).
- Pray God will open your heart to what His Word says is the good life.

## THIS WEEK

### ☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Jesus was adopting the role of Moses in delivering God’s instruction from the mountain top.

### ☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

The instruction Moses delivered to Israel after coming down from Mount Sinai was a gift, but the Israelites never allowed His teaching, often referred to as “the Law,” to have its intended effect. The Law was supposed to change the people’s hearts, but the Israelites never committed themselves to it to that degree. Jesus’s goal in this sermon was to show His followers, including us, how to allow the Law to reach our hearts.

### ☒ MEDITATE

*“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17).*

## GETTING STARTED

+ *Use this section to prepare your heart for the truths you will encounter this week and to connect this passage’s main point to your own life.*

♀: *Why would Matthew present Jesus as filling the same role Moses filled for Old Testament Israel?*

♀: *Why are laws crucial for human flourishing?*

Matthew begins his Gospel by establishing several parallels between Jesus and Moses, the great leader who brought the Israelites out of Egypt and gave them God's law. In both of their birth stories, Israelite boys were slaughtered by an ego-maniacal tyrant king (Exodus 1:15–22; Matthew 2:16). Both Moses and Jesus had to flee to keep from being executed by him (Exodus 2:15; Matthew 2:13). These parallels are enhanced by the way Matthew uses Scripture to create further links between Jesus and the people of Israel (Matthew 2:6, 15, and 18).

The most important link between Jesus and Moses occurs in what is known as the Sermon on the Mount. In the presence of a gathering crowd, Jesus went up on a mountain and taught the crowds, just as Moses went up Mount Sinai and brought God's Law down to teach the people. As Jesus emphasized in His sermon, His teaching did not contradict Moses's teaching but brought it to a greater fulfillment in the hearts of His followers.

♀: *Why is it important to see the continuity between Jesus and Moses, especially concerning their teaching on God's Law?*

♀: *Apart from your faith in God, what assurances would you have that there is a purpose to the daily occurrences of your life?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – In ancient times, the gods of various civilizations often took on more human qualities than we would typically associate with the idea or concept of “god.” Thus, their gods were often quite capricious, and those who believed in them could never be assured their gods would be consistent from one day to the next. Today, many people have abandoned belief in God in favor of naturalistic or evolutionary explanations of the universe. Again, they can have no expectation of a purpose or consistency in the universe. This is not the case for followers of Jesus. As Jesus makes clear in the sermon, God acts consistently in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. There are changes. Jesus claims to fulfill the Law, which suggests significant differences, but even the differences between what Moses did and what Jesus came to do follow a certain consistency. God

did not just arbitrarily decide what was right or wrong, neither in the time of Moses nor in the time of Christ. As you encounter trials and difficulties throughout this series, know that the God who gave Moses the Law and who empowered Jesus to give the Sermon on the Mount is consistent. He acts with a purpose.

## ▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Matthew 5 is the first section of the Sermon on the Mount. In many ways, the Sermon on the Mount is about how to live the good life. As we will see, however, the good life Jesus promoted is far different than what our culture considers to be the good life.

### 1. REAPING WHAT YOU SOW (MATTHEW 5:1–10)

### 2. REJOICING IN PERSECUTION (MATTHEW 5:11–16)

### 3. FULFILLING THE LAW (MATTHEW 5:17–48)

## GOING DEEPER

*+This section will investigate Matthew 5 in further detail to understand how Jesus’s sermon promotes the true good life.*

## 1. REAPING WHAT YOU SOW

### ▣ MATTHEW 5:1–10

Q: *What general principle underlies all the Beatitudes?*

Q: *How do the Beatitudes turn conventional wisdom on its head?*

In Matthew 5:1–10, Jesus gave eight short sayings beginning with the word “blessed.” These sayings have become known as the “Beatitudes.” The Beatitudes are amazingly simple to understand when read individually. The challenging part of understanding them is trying to determine a single, overarching principle underlying them.

Perhaps these statements can best be understood by the phrase, “You reap what you sow.” For example, those who seek righteousness will find it (v. 6). If “you reap what you sow” is the general principle underlying the Beatitudes, then these short statements are remarkable not only for what they say but for how they turn the wisdom of the world upside down. For example, in ancient and modern times, the way to gain power and prestige and influence over others has been to exude confidence and boldness. According to Jesus, however, it is the meek who will inherit the earth (v. 5). We would typically think those who suffer persecution have lost everything. Jesus, however, said those who suffer persecution gain everything in gaining the kingdom of heaven (v. 10). This dynamic is not present in all the beatitudes, but for the ones in which it is active, Jesus shows His followers that the wisdom of this world does not always correspond to the wisdom of His kingdom. You will reap what you sow, but the economy here is determined by the rules Jesus set for His kingdom, not the rules that seem to govern the world from our modern perspective.

Q: *How does the principle, “You reap what you sow,” relate to the gospel principle, “Jesus has paid the full price for our sins”?*

Q: *How can you use the Beatitudes to challenge prevailing beliefs in our culture?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – People will do anything to get ahead in life. This urge to gain profit or power over others leads some people to undercut their peers in order to stand out for the big promotion at work. For others, it leads them to cheat on a test at school. It can lead others into criminal activity. Strangely enough, the urge to get ahead encourages some people to become victims. There is nothing fallen humanity will not do to promote itself. This is the mindset the Beatitudes prohibit for Christians. For Christians, self-promotion never excuses immorality. Our lives cannot be governed by the drive to succeed or triumph over others.

There are eight beatitudes. For the next month, focus on adopting the mindset and principles of two beatitudes per week. Allow these principles to govern your work and family habits during the week. On some occasions, you will likely be taken advantage of by others, perhaps even members of your own family. That is okay. The point of the Beatitudes is not getting what is yours but getting what Christ offers you, which is far better. The Beatitudes offer a countercultural way of life that will get you noticed. Be prepared to share the hope you have in Christ with those who see you living for another kingdom.

## 2. REJOICING IN PERSECUTION

### ❑ MATTHEW 5:11-16

Q: *How does the final “blessed are you” statement differ from the previous eight?*

Q: *How do the examples of salt and light relate to those who persecute the followers of Jesus?*

The followers of Jesus were always destined to suffer persecution. Jesus recognized this, and He also recognized the dangers of giving into the demands of those who would persecute His followers. The examples of salt and light serve as a warning to all those who endure persecution because of their Christian beliefs. Giving in is not an option! If followers of Christ abandon their testimony concerning Him, they are no longer capable of fulfilling their mission. They become tasteless salt or obstructed light. Instead of giving into persecution, Jesus urged His followers to rejoice in persecution. Persecution is an indication that you are fulfilling the mission He gave you. You are being salt and light to the world. Thus, Jesus calls on everyone who suffers persecution because of their belief in Him to rejoice in the confirmation of their faithfulness. Suffering persecution is an indication of a blessed life.

Q: *How are Jesus’s words counterintuitive in our culture?*

Q: *In what ways, directly or indirectly, have you suffered persecution for your faith in Jesus?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – We live in a pampered society. Our comforts have increased exponentially over previous generations. Many of the daily struggles they had are easily fixed by flipping a switch or turning of a knob. And we take for granted many of the modern conveniences we have such as plumbing, electricity, automobiles, and computers. These conveniences are not wrong in themselves, but they can lead to habits of thought that prevent us from appreciating biblical truths. For example, many people in today’s world consider even the slightest discomfort or hardship something to be avoided. If a task is difficult or challenging, then something must need to be fixed. This mindset is foreign to the Beatitudes. In the Beatitudes, hardship in this life is the forerunner to the blessings we will experience in the next. Discomfort can be tolerated because this life is not all there is.

The attitude on display in the Beatitudes is crucial for us to persevere through persecution. To be salt and light in the world, we must be able to endure persecution. For the moment, most of us do not face significant persecution, but there are increasing signs of change on this front. In light of this, we must prepare ourselves to face persecution. We need to entrench ourselves in our Christian commitments and be prepared to suffer for them. On a small scale, we can prepare to face persecutions in life by refusing to bow a knee to the false gods of comfort and ease. Consider inviting a small hardship into your life. Do not automatically choose the easier of two options. Forego the next gadget that will make life incrementally easier. Invite small hardships into your life as a reminder that you may one day be called on to face much more significant hardships because of your faith.

### 3. FULFILLING THE LAW

#### ■ MATTHEW 5:17–48

Q: *Why would someone have accused Jesus of abolishing the Law and the Prophets?*

Q: *In what way could Jesus fulfill the Law and the Prophets?*

Jesus often raised the ire of the religious leaders of His day because, in their legalistic minds, He was teaching others to disregard the teachings found in their Scripture. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus demonstrated that nothing could be further from the truth. He was not telling others to disregard the teachings of the Jewish Scriptures but helping them to see the fulfillment of them.

It may seem strange to us to hear Jesus describe Israel's Scriptures, especially the parts we understand to be the Law, as something that needed to be fulfilled. In one sense, Israel's Scriptures are fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27, 44–47). That is, the Old Testament describes a world that is in desperate need of Jesus's work and, in some places, anticipates Jesus's coming to complete this work. In another sense, probably closer to what is intended in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament by helping His followers see the true intent behind the Scriptures. According to Jesus, the Law in the Old Testament was worded in such a way as to promote righteousness by limiting the disastrous effects of human sin.

The religious leaders of Jesus's day, however, had badly missed this crucial point. They believed the Law described the limits of what was and was not permissible. Some of the specific examples Jesus mentioned are discussed

further below, but the main point is that it was the religious leaders of Jesus's day who had relaxed the righteous requirements of the Law in their misunderstanding of what it was all about. Thus, Jesus, who was accused by others of disregarding the Law, declared one's righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20).

🔗: *Why was it important for Jesus to show the continuity between His message and the Old Testament?*

🔗: *In what ways are you inadvertently teaching others to relax the righteous intent of the Old Testament law?*

**APPLICATION** – Have you or someone you know ever wondered whether a particular action should be considered a sin or not? Oftentimes, people question how far down a particular insidious path they can venture before they actually fall into sin. “Is it okay if I light up but don’t inhale?” “What if we just ‘make out’ but don’t become more physical?” You have likely heard these or similar conversations play out. The problem with such questions and scenarios is they are wrong-headed from the start. Such a mindset makes the same mistake the religious leaders of Jesus’s time made. God’s law is about pursuing righteousness, not about stating unequivocally how close one can venture to the edge of a precipice without falling. As you read through the remainder of this lesson, consider situations in which you have heard or are likely to hear these laws misconstrued. Be prepared to point others toward a better goal, the pursuit of righteousness, rather than becoming ensconced in their misguided efforts to determine how far they can run toward sin without falling into it.

🔗: *How does Jesus’s explanation of the Old Testament injunction against murder push His listeners further toward righteousness?*

🔗: *What is the relationship between murder and reconciliation?*

Jesus began with a well-known Old Testament law. In Exodus 20:13, Moses prohibited murder. This is one of the Ten Commandments, the ten great principles forming the foundation of all Old Testament Law. The scribes and

Pharisees would have had their followers believe that as long as they did not murder another person, they were fulfilling the intent of the Law. Jesus, however, did not settle for such a low standard. Instead, He showed that the prohibition against murder was put in place to limit the extent of sin's destruction. If an Israelite became angry at another person, they could not act on their anger by murdering the person. To do so would incur the retributive justice from the community. The prohibition against murder limited how far a person's unchecked sin could lead them.

The religious leaders during Jesus's time claimed that as long as one person did not murder another, then their conduct was righteous. But Jesus exposed this as a perversion of the true intent behind the Law. Jesus did not allow God's righteous standard to be relaxed. Instead, He taught that any ill-will toward another person falls short of the righteousness God expects from His people. Thus, rather than focus on the outer limit of socially acceptable conduct, Jesus not only forbade murder but promoted reconciliation (Matthew 5:24). Reconciliation between two parties is a far greater expression of the righteousness God expects from His children.

Q: *In what ways can you pursue reconciliation after experiencing conflict with others?*

Q: *Why is it challenging to give up grudges?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Jesus's approach to Old Testament Law helps us see that our sins are often rooted in deeper spiritual deficiencies than we might first recognize. For example, murder not only demonstrates hatred for another person but also a deeply rooted sense of pride. The reason you hate another person is because they have not sufficiently recognized how central you are to holding the universe together, and until they give you the respect you know you are due, reconciliation is an impossibility. In reality, reconciliation demands that you put yourself aside for the sake of others. Reconciliation demands that you recognize that it is God who is at the center of the universe. If we treat the Old Testament laws as the limits of what is acceptable, we will have no avenue to address sin in our lives. If there is someone you need to be reconciled with, begin by considering whether you need to first repent of pride.

Q: *Why is a prohibition against adultery an inadequate standard for sexual morality?*



**Q:** *How do Jesus's comments on lust reveal what biblical sexual morality looks like?*

After addressing murder and reconciliation, Jesus turned His attention to adultery, which is also one of the ten foundational principles underlying the Old Testament Law (Exodus 20:14). It would be possible to have the injunction against adultery signal the dividing line between what was righteous behavior and what was sexually immoral. Again, Jesus would have none of it. The prohibition of adultery was intended to limit the destruction caused by unchecked lust. It was never intended to signal the line between what was sinful and what was permissible. Jesus's point is quite obvious once even a little thought is given to the matter.

Jesus strengthened this point as He elaborated on this subject. If the act of adultery were the dividing line between what was and what was not acceptable for sexual morality, then Jesus's comments concerning the eye and the hand would be impossible to understand. Why put forward such extreme measures if the eye and the hand are not what ultimately push one over the line into sin? No, Jesus was teaching us that what we allow our eyes to dwell on is an indicator of what is in our hearts. The hand that would initiate an adulterous encounter is just as culpable as the whole body would be if that deed were carried out. We would be better off without our eyes and hands if they are instruments of pursuing sexual immorality. But we would be better still if our eyes and hands were instruments of pursuing righteousness.

**Q:** *How can we avoid lust in a society that panders to sensuality?*

**Q:** *How can we metaphorically follow Jesus's injunctions to cut out our eye and cut off our hand in order to flee sexual temptation?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Our culture is currently seeing a militant attempt to liberate sex from any moral or ethical restraint beyond mere consent. Such a project will inevitably end in disaster, and in many ways, we are already seeing the effects of this tragedy. Christians must make every effort to avoid getting swept up in this largescale cultural project. Job claims to have made a covenant with his eyes to never look lustfully upon a woman (Job 31:1). This a minimum commitment for us in fighting the onslaught of sexual perversion we are confronted with. In the coming years, it will likely grow more challenging for Christians to indulge in the entertainment industry. As Jesus argued, this is a small price to pay to protect our souls from such devastating sin. Evaluate the programming you watch and the music you listen to. If these are working against the sexual purity you must seek as a follower of Christ, it would be better to cut them off than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Q: *How does Jesus demonstrate the true meaning of the eye-for-an-eye law [Matthew 5:38]?*

Q: *How could eye-for-an-eye become a distortion of God's commitment to justice?*


**APPLICATION POINT** – Strangely, we live in a society that balks at the notion of carrying out anything resembling eye-for-an-eye as a legal standard but applauds the application of the same concept on a personal level. Personal justice demands that you even the score with those who have wronged you, and the best way to even the score is by doing to them what they did to you. You have likely seen this form of justice carried out numerous times. If you are living for God's glory, however, Jesus invites you to adopt a different standard. Life is not about getting even with those who have harmed you. It is about living for God's glory. This week commit to seeking God's glory when others would seek to do you harm. This does not mean laying justice aside. Some actions must be accounted for. Failing to seek justice does not glorify God. But as a follower of Christ, justice can never be about retribution. Perhaps your unwillingness to put yourself and your vindication at the center of everything will become a powerful testimony to the magnificence of the God you serve.

## NEXT STEPS

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was teaching His followers how to live for eternity. His teaching requires us to adopt some countercultural practices and mindsets. If we are living for the life to come, we cannot live like this life is all there is. If we are living for the life to come, we will hold strong to our Christian commitments even in the face of severe persecution. If we are living for the life to come, we will pursue righteousness instead of seeing how far we can run toward sin before falling into it. The broad principle to be adopted from the Sermon on the Mount is to live now in a way that prioritizes the life to come. Seek to put this principle into practice in your life.

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*



God, help me to live for your kingdom to come.

Lord Jesus, help me to engrain the Beatitudes into my thought life and into my outlook on life.

Lord Jesus, thank you for fulfilling the Law and the Prophets fully. Help my life to be marked with a true and consistent application of these principles.

Father, help prepare my soul for persecution.

