*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

May 22 - 27

The Sermon on the Mount

**Monday, May 22 Matthew 5:1-16**

*“He began to teach them”*

“We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

The Preamble of the Constitution of the United States expresses succinctly the ethos of the nation to be, and provides a summarization of the articles of the constitution to follow. In a similar manner, the Beatitudes serve as a sort of preamble to the Sermon on the Mount, giving a succinct statement of the ethos of the kingdom of heaven that Jesus earlier announced and summarizes the principles of kingdom life that he will articulate in the sermon that follows.

Next Jesus gives two metaphors, focusing on his disciples and declaring how they will impact the world with the kingdom life they possess. Into the world in which they can expect to find persecution, they are to go as “salt” and as “light.”

*As I live in this world, Lord, may I be salt and light for you. Amen.*

**Tuesday, May 23 Matthew 5:17-48**

*“You have heard . . .”*

Jesus is speaking in a religious context in which the teachers of the law and the Pharisees held sway over the lives of the common people. The Pharisees had mapped out what they considered to be the proper course for attaining righteousness through their interpretation and application of the Old Testament. One facet of the regimen was a tendency to require legalistic, external obedience to the law without calling attention to an inner obedience from the heart.

Jesus here looks at several examples of how they do this and demonstrates how correct interpretation and application of the law must be based on proper *intent* and *motive.* He does not say, “Hear what the Old Testament says”; rather, he says, “You have heard it said.” Jesus is not negating the Old Testament but the people’s understanding and application of it. He confronts faulty interpretation by given his authoritative pronouncement, showing the original intention of the law. By living with proper intent and motive, those in the kingdom of heaven will live a righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees.

*May the intent and motive of my heart, Lord, line up with yours. Amen.*

**Wednesday, May 24 Matthew 6:1-34**

*“Do the work of God’s kingdom”*

Having spoken of an inner, heart righteousness in chapter 5, Jesus turns to external acts of righteousness in chapter 6. Jesus first addresses the arena of public religion, because this is the place where a person’s spirituality is developed and tested. But this arena is also hazardous, because public religious practice can be carried out primarily to be seen by people. If this is the case, such attention-seeking display of public piety will have no reward from our Father in heaven. Motive is more important than simple activity.

On the one hand, while wrong external motives rob one of the Father’s blessing, so does wrong internal concerns about wealth and worry. On the other hand, disciples can properly live with the priority of the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness, for the Father knows the needs of his children and will provide for them. Thus, we need to choose our master: God or wealth. If we chose God, the next question might be, “Who will take care of my daily needs?” This leads to a second option: God or worry.

*Your kingdom purpose, Lord, is the basis for my outward and inward life. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

May 22 - 27

The Sermon on the Mount

**Thursday, May 25 Matthew 7:1-14**

*“Relationship with others”*

  In chapter 6, Jesus spent considerable time condemning the religious leaders for their hypocrisy, the outward appearance of righteousness for the acclaim of people. Now he acknowledges that his own disciples can fall into hypocrisy (vv. 1-5). Then he adds a word of caution against the opposite extreme – being undiscerning (v. 6). To avoid both extremes is an impossible task in one’s own power, so Jesus includes a section on prayer to show his disciples how to live in balance, both in this problem and in all others (vv. 7-12). Kingdom life allows his disciples to live properly in relationship to others. It will free them from both improper judgmental attitudes as well as guard them from gullibility toward the truly hurtful people in this world.

Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount with four basic warnings, the first of which speaks of two gates and roads (vv. 13-14). While the broad gate and road is inviting, offering plenty of room for those who would follow the cultural norms, the narrow gate and road is much more restrictive, because it is limited to Jesus and his manner of discipleship.

*I pray that all my relationships, Lord, will be guided by your kingdom purposes. Amen.*

**Friday, May 26 Matthew 7:15-27**

*“Three warnings”*

On that narrow road (v. 14) disciples are to watch out for false prophets (vv. 15-20). Jesus has already warned against religious leaders who lead the people astray be falsely speaking for God. Now he warns against those who seem to be genuine members of his flock by their talk and association with the group, but their intentions are evil.

Jesus also warns of false disciples (vv. 21-23). These are individuals who confess Jesus as Lord but whom Jesus knows have not truly repented as a condition for entering the kingdom of heaven. They point to their activity as a sign of their discipleship, but Jesus has never emphasized the external as being the highest sign of authenticity. He demands an inward allegiance to God’s will, which will produce the fruit of a changed life.

Jesus concludes his sermon with the parable of the wise and foolish builders (vv. 24-27), with this warning directed at “anyone” who has been listening to his teaching. Will they foolishly hear but not obey, or will they wisely do what Jesus has taught?

*By your Holy Spirit, Lord, may I live wisely in God’s kingdom. Amen.*

**Saturday, May 27 Matthew 7:28-29**

*“They were amazed at his teaching”*

Jesus has inherent authority. This is seen not only in his repeated declarations in the antitheses, “but I say to you,” showing how he fulfills the Old Testament, but also in his dramatic declaration as the judge of a human’s eternal destiny: “I will tell them plainly, ‘I never know you.’” The prophets and writers of the Old Testament did not speak of their own authority; instead, they declared, “Thus sayeth the Lord.” Jesus’ teaching clearly indicates that he bears God’s own authority.

But Matthew’s conclusion is ironic. Amazement at Jesus’ teaching does not indicate acceptance. The term “amazed” is not a description of faith. It indicates a variety of emotional responses but not a commitment to Jesus’ ministry as the Son of God sent by the Father as his Messiah. Only when a person accepts Jesus’ invitation and enters the kingdom of heaven does he or she become a disciple. Jesus does not want people simply to listen and go away amazed. He wants them to listen and to make a decision for him.

*I have come out of the crowd, Lord, and made a decision for you. Amen.*