

A Reader's Guide to Discipleship©: Readings in the New Testament

2009

The sufficiency of the scriptures for all things pertaining to life and godliness
(II Tim 3:16)

The Sermon on the Mount: a primer for discipleship

Jesus knew that a change in thinking would be needed to follow Him in the spiritual kingdom He was introducing. He teaches would-be disciples (talmudim) what it means to follow him as Rabbi.

I. Matt 5.3-10: Preparation to be a blessing to the nations begins with receiving God's divine favour individually (not nationally)

-Context: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4.17)

-The call to the kingdom: blessed to be a blessing to all nations Gen 12.1-3

-Jesus clarifies what is required to receive blessing

A. God provides what is needed to be disciples by His blessing 5.3-10

-5.3 our emptiness is God's conduit for establishing His kingdom within us

-5.4 our pain about our fallen world is God's conduit for strengthening
(comfort = to be made strong)

-5.5 our ability to hold our own desires in check is God's conduit for giving us
our inheritance (responsibility for the kingdom on earth- see Ps 37:11)

-5.6 our hunger for righteousness is God's conduit for establishing His
kingdom standards of justice (Prov 10:24)

-5.7 the mercy we show is God's conduit for giving mercy (compliment to His
justice)

-5.8 our single-minded pursuit of God is God's conduit for getting personal
with those in the kingdom.

-5.9 our pursuit of peace is God's way of establishing His presence
(representing himself on earth through his sons) since He came for a
ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5.18-19)

-5.10 our perseverance through suffering is God's way of establishing a
foothold for the kingdom to grow.

B. Application to disciples 5:11-12

- note text shifts to second person instead of third person.

-see themselves as needing the character of the prophets

-see themselves as receiving the reward of the prophets

C. How do you know when you have been blessed? What about faith?

-It is only through the outpouring of God's favour that we are able to be His
disciples.

Our task	God's response
Emptying of self	Establishes His kingdom in me
Mourning the loss of God's order	Provides strength
Putting aside personal desires	Gives us responsibility for the earth
Hunger for righteousness	Enables us to live out His standards
Showing mercy	Gives mercy
Pursuing God as our treasure	Gives Himself to us
Pursuing peace	Makes us His sons to represent Him in the work of reconciliation
Persevering in trials	Enables the Kingdom to pour out of us

II. Matt 5.13-16 keys to sharing the blessing: keeping our flavour and positioning our light. We don't have to worry about being salty and being light: we should worry about staying salty and how to use our light.

A. Connection with the beatitudes

- God pours out His favour on us so that we can be salt and light: two great blessings to man
- there is no saltiness or light if we do not receive Gods blessing
- but we must persevere, rising above the circumstances to extend these blessings to others like the prophets tried to do (5:11-12)

B. Warning: even if we have received God's blessing we can become ineffective

- NaCl is soluble and impurities are insoluble- saltiness can wash out of the salt. The impurities give different salts there specific flavours but if no NaCl there is no saltiness.
- our lives are a mixture of the impurities and the salt.
- it does not take much NaCl to be salty but if enough of the NaCl is washed out, the flavour will be gone.
- We must be careful that the saltiness God gives us is not washed away

C. Imperative: we position ourselves in the world so others can see our light and glorify God

- It is not about shining brightly it is about shining effectively
- God will give His blessing to us which makes us the lights of the world.
- We must be purposeful with the light God has given us
- What about Matt 6:1? - take heed that you do Not do your "charitable deeds" before men to be seen by them.
- God's intention is that our "works" would bring glory to Him not to us!
- "works" vs "charitable deeds": one is a decoration the other a way of life

III. Matt 5.17-48 The inner battle for obedience

A. 5.17-20 Christ comes to fulfil the purpose of the law and the prophets in His spiritual kingdom.

- Jesus demonstrates His submission to a higher law
- the measure of success in the kingdom is obedience
- this obedience is not simply about doing the right thing- it is about doing the right thing for the right reason (unlike the Pharisees)

B. 5.21-26 dealing with anger through reconciliation

- The sin of murder begins in the heart with anger
- reconcile with your brother
- reconcile with your adversary. Don't exploit opportunity for gain

C. 5.27-32 dealing with lust through self-control

- the sin of adultery begins in the heart with lust
- the sin progresses to the eyes and the hands but you must stop it before it gets there ("cut them off")
- the cause of divorce is often lust but you cannot make the divorce law serve your own purposes

D. 5.33-37 communicating personal integrity through your words

-integrity can only be grounded in the heart- nothing external is adequate

E. 5.38- 48 dealing with evil through overwhelming love

- (see Mark 12:28-31- love your neighbour as yourself)
- the law of retribution is redefined as opportunity to give
- the law of love supersedes our personal rights (see James- the royal law of love).
- God does not remove our rights; he asks us to submit them to a higher law: the law of love

IV. Matt 6.1-6.18 Spirituality is not a performance. The safest place to be is out of the sight of others.

A. Kingdom work is not a performance

- "hypocrisy" comes from the idea of play acting. Jesus is saying that spirituality is not a Greek act or play. It is a condition of the soul.
- one of the greatest dangers we face is self-deception. We can easily think our behaviour tells the condition of our soul.
- While outward sinful behaviours reveal the inward reality of sin (5.17-48), outward spiritual behaviours may be mere acting. This cannot be an issue if they are done in secret.
- But kingdom work must be seen by others. See Matt 5.16: let others see your good works, in fact, set them on a hill! Key distinction is **who is the audience: God or man. Seek applause from God.**

B. 6.1-4 the secret practice of charity (giving)

- do not seek the praise of men
- do not seek to "feel good about yourself".

C. 6.5-15 the secret practice of prayer

1. The posture of prayer does not make it more effective 6.5-8

- prayer is between you and the Lord.
- prayer is a private conversation not a public ritual. Until the 12th century the posture of prayer was the oration (elbows in, hands up). The Medieval feudal system ceremony of submission and the origin of pews in the church promoted the development of hands folded, head bowed, eyes closed prayer.
- Matt 18.19 agreement in prayer is not about how to pray but about seeking counsel about what to pray. First counsel, then ask the Lord.

2. The words of prayer have no power apart from a heart aligned with God's ways. 6.9-15

- Lord's prayer as model. Jesus as a model- goes alone to pray (e.g. Mark 6.46). See also Luke 18:1-14: persistence in prayer and humility in prayer
- Paul: I Tim 2:1,8, Rom 8.26-27 (see I Cor 14.14-15: the spirit praying does not mean that we should not understand), I Thess 5.17, Phil 4.6
- James: the effective fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Jms 5.16-17
- Rev 5.8: prayers are like incense before the Lord

D. 6.16-18 the secret practice of fasting (self-discipline)

- Jesus defines fasting as an inward discipline
- physical out workings should be kept secret

V. Matt 6.19-34 Living confidently for the kingdom today in light of the world to come

A. 6.19-23 choosing treasures that cannot be taken

- We are wired to seek treasure. The issue is whether or not these treasures are temporal or eternal.
- We are driven by what we value. Our calling in life will be defined not by what we do but by why we do what we do.
- treasures of this world do not last. Treasures of heaven last forever.
- 6.22-23 We must cultivate an eye for the things of eternal value
- 6.24 it is not just a matter of what we value, it is also about who (or what) we serve

B. 6.25-34 confidence for living day to day in the kingdom

- therefore, we should not worry about our life
- meaning of life: more than what we eat and wear.
- value of life: man is more than an animal
- God is in control
- day to day life need only be a search for the kingdom
- our basic needs are met (God's lavish reward is later)

VI. Matt 7.1-27 Key principles for kingdom living

A. 7.1-6 take responsibility for our own sin

- judging others starts a bad cycle of finger pointing
- judging others distracts you from taking responsibility for your own sin.
- 7.6 your principles (the "pearls") only get trampled when used against others. They are only beautiful when you wear them.

B. 7.7-11 ask like a son not like a beggar

- we should always be moving forward
- we can be sure that when we ask, we will be given the best.

C. 7.12 do unto others as you would have them do unto you

- simple, intuitive test for knowing what to do

D. 7.13-14 don't take the easy way, take the right way

- the narrow path to life
- the wide path to destruction

E. 7.15-23 beware of imposters

- false prophets will seek to destroy
- false prophets are known by their destructiveness
- claiming to follow Jesus is of no value if there is no obedience.

F. 7.24-27 build your future on the foundation of personal obedience to the word of God

- foundation of solid rock=obedience to the word
- foundation of sand=failure to obey the word