

Restore Series (5): Restoring Society Pt 2 (The Sermon on the Mount) // Steve Sutton

Intro

We are well and truly into our a series called Restore, which is centering around two key words that are used to describe the dream of God for our lives and for this world: 'shalom' Hebrew word translated 'peace' in the OT and 'sodzo' a Greek word translated 'to save' in the NT. Both words carry the ideas of = healing, restoring, rescuing, repairing, delivering, harmony, wholeness and wellness. Shalom = nothing broken, nothing missing.

Salvation = Latin 'salve' a healing ointment or balm.

Last week we began to look at the restoration of society based upon John 3:17: *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

The little phrase 'the world' refers to human society and community.

If we were students of New Testament Greek, we would read John 3:17 as follows: *For God did not send his Son into society to condemn society, but to heal, rescue, restore, repair, deliver, bring harmony to, make whole and*

make well society through him.

The Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5-7 is Jesus' **blueprint** for a healthy functioning and flourishing society and it gives us an idea of what good citizenship looks like. It is the ethical and moral framework to embrace if we want to live in a decent community.

The problem with the Sermon on the Mount, however, is that its standards appear to be set impossibly high.

Virginia Owens is a high school teacher who gave her students the Sermon on the Mount to read and to write an essay on. Most of the students had never heard of the Sermon on the Mount, never mind read it. And they hated it! Here are two responses from her students:

“I did not like the Sermon on the Mount. It made me feel like I had to be perfect and no one is.”

“The things asked in this sermon are absurd. To look at a woman like that is adultery! To be angry or insult someone like that is murder! Those are the most extreme, stupid, inhumane statements I have ever heard.”

The reality is, like these students we too struggle with the Sermon on the Mount. The reason we do so is that we make the mistake of approaching it as a set of laws to

follow, rather than seeing it as an invitation to live a life of love. The Sermon on the Mount is what love looks like in the day-to-day ordinariness of life. It is a practical, concrete expression of love. It is love in action.

So the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' vision of a society founded upon love. And it begins as we said last week with our inner life, our hearts being transformed by virtues, which are found at the beginning of Matthew 5 in what are known as the Beatitudes. To have any chance of living out Jesus' teaching we must first aim to be the kind of person from whom the practices of the Sermon on the Mount can naturally flow. We first need our hearts restored before society can be restored.

Last week we looked at the nine characteristics of a virtuous/good heart.

We said that the first and primary virtue is **humility**

'Blessed are the poor in spirit'

The very first instruction given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is the key to unlocking and living out everything else that follows. If we aren't humble before God and others, that is if we are proud and arrogant – then society will invariably break down.

So the assumption is that when we have cultivated an inner life of goodness, we can then begin to focus on the outer world of being a good citizen.

In the future we will take an in-depth look at the Sermon on the Mount, but right now let's just run very quickly through the key points. I'm using The Message Bible because it paints a very earthy view of Jesus' teaching. It's harder to avoid or misinterpret what he's really saying.

1. Get involved in society (Matthew 5:13-16)

“Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth...

“Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world...”

One of the temptations of religion is escapism and separation from society rather than engagement and participation in it.

That's why Jesus calls us to be salt and light.

Jesus says good citizenship means getting involved in society and acting as a form of preservation and illumination. Salt in the ancient world was used as a means of preventing food from decaying.

2. Let go of anger (Matthew 5:21-22)

“I’m telling you that anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder.”

3. If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything (Matthew 5:21-22)

“Carelessly call a brother ‘idiot!’ and you just might find yourself hauled into court. Thoughtlessly yell ‘stupid!’ at a sister and you are on the brink of hellfire. The simple moral fact is that words kill.”

Be careful what you say! And be careful too of how you say it.

4. Reconciliation is more important than going to church (Matthew 5:23-26)

“If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God... [If] an old enemy accosts you. Don’t lose a minute. Make the first move; make things right with him.”

Take the initiative to resolve conflict.

5. People are more than their body (Matthew 5:27-30)

Jesus in warning against adultery says, “Don’t go to bed with another’s spouse.” But he gives more than a prohibition about behaviour he goes on to say: “But don’t think you’ve preserved your virtue simply by staying out of bed. Your *heart* can be corrupted by lust even quicker than your *body*. Those leering looks you think nobody notices—they also corrupt.”

He’s talking about not objectify people for our personal pleasure. I think what Jesus is proposing is that it’s best not to share our body with someone unless we are prepared to share our life with them.

6. Honour your marriage vows (Matthew 5:31-32)

“Remember the Scripture that says, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him do it legally, giving her divorce papers and her legal rights’? Too many of you are using that as a cover for selfishness and whim, pretending to be righteous just because you are ‘legal.’ Please, no more pretending... You can’t use legal cover to mask a moral failure.”

In Jesus’ day it was very easy for a husband to get rid of a

wife that didn't please him. A man could divorce for any reason whatsoever. It was quite brutal and Jesus challenged the social norm and the ease with which divorce could occur. If a man was unhappy with his wife, all he had to do was hand her a certificate of divorce. That certificate was proof that she was unmarried and it allowed her to defend herself against the charge of adultery. Now a man was thought to be a good man if he provided his wife with this certificate. Yet, those divorce papers under most circumstances was devastating for the woman. It essentially ruined her life. There were only three possibilities for her:

- She might find a relative willing to take her in – if so it was usually as a servant
- She might find a man that was willing to marry her but she would always be considered to be damaged goods and there was a high likelihood of abuse in the relationship
- She would be forced into prostitution in order to support herself

If you understand that Jesus stance against divorce was to provide protection for the most vulnerable. He was standing up for those who were at risk. We no longer live in that kind of world.

**7. Every word, no matter how small should be
integrity.** (Matthew 5:33-37)

“And don’t say anything you don’t mean... You only make things worse when you lay down a smoke screen of pious talk, saying, ‘I’ll pray for you,’ and never doing it, or saying, ‘God be with you,’ and not meaning it. You don’t make your words true by embellishing them with religious lace... Just say ‘yes’ and ‘no.’ When you manipulate words to get your own way, you go wrong.”

8. Practice non-violence (Matthew 5:38-42)

Turning the other cheek, going the second mile and giving your cloak to one who sues you.

9. Love your enemies and pray for them (Matthew 5:43-48)

“You’re familiar with the old written law, ‘Love your friend,’ and its unwritten companion, ‘Hate your enemy.’ I’m challenging that. I’m telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves.”

10. Live out your faith in non-religious ways (Matthew 6:1-7,16-18)

Jesus identifies three spiritual disciplines: giving to the poor, prayer and fasting.

For each of these Jesus says we are not to turn them into an occasion for a performance. Keep our giving low-key and keep our prayers short.

11. Forgive (Matthew 6:14-15)

You can't get forgiveness from God, without also forgiving others.

12. Develop a healthy relationship with money and possessions (Matthew 6:19-24)

“Don't store up treasures here on earth”

It's quite ok to have money and possessions – the problem is when they have us.

Matthew 6:22-23 is a call to generosity, “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy (generous), your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy (stingy), your whole body will be full of darkness.”

Live generously!

13. Let go of worry (Matthew 6:25-34)

“So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.”

Anxiety free living involves trusting God to be our loving parent.

14. Take a good, hard honest look at yourself before you judge anyone else (Matthew 7:1-5)

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?

Be conscious of your own frailties and faults.

15. Persistence pays off (Matthew 7:7-11)

Asking, seeking, knocking.

16. Live by the Golden Rule because it's a summary of the entire Bible (Matthew 7:12)

“Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for *them*. Add up God's Law and Prophets and this is what you get.”

17. Give God your best (Matthew 7:13-14)

“Don't look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way to life—to God—is vigorous and requires total attention.”

18. Be a person of character not just charisma

(Matthew 7:15-20)

“Who preachers *are* is the main thing, not what they say.”

19. Walk the talk (Matthew 7:21-23)

“Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter.”

20. Apply the truth don't just listen to it (Matthew 7:24-27)

“Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock... But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand.”

The Sermon on the Mount is not an impossible set of standards but an invite to adopt a way of practically living a life of love that is the by product of a virtuous heart that has been shaped by God's grace. It is God's way to build a good, fair and just society.

Conclusion Matthew 7:28-29

“When Jesus concluded his address, the crowd burst into applause. They had never heard teaching like this. It was apparent that he was living everything he was saying—quite a contrast to their religion teachers! This was the best teaching they had ever heard.”

