



Session One

The Sermon on the Mount, Pt.1

Matthew 5

Matthew 5-7, which we know as the Sermon on the Mount, is probably the single most important (and detailed) distillation of Jesus' teaching in Scripture. In these three chapters, Jesus tells us not only how to live but describes how life in the Kingdom is to be.

Of the three chapters, the case can be made that the first, chapter 5, is the most important. Certainly it is the most dense in terms of the sheer amount of information packed into its 48 verses.

The chapter begins with the so-called *beatitudes* which, collectively, give voice to the essence of the Sermon's teachings. Following this week's reading guide is a handout I've prepared on the beatitudes which you may find helpful as you read through them.

Questions to consider as you read Matthew Chapter 5

1) Think about the beatitudes and what they suggest is important and valued in the Kingdom. To what extent do you think the priorities and values of the beatitudes are reflected in the world as you know it? To what extent are they reflected in the priorities and values of your own life?

2) Jesus speaks of "salt" and "light" (5:13-16). Jesus followers often find it easy to discern what Jesus means in referring to us as "the light of the world"; harder is what he means by "salt of the earth." If you're to be the salt of the earth, what does that mean to you?

4) Matthew 5:17 begins what are known as the *antitheses*, six statements that comprise the remainder of the chapter, that begin, "You have heard it said X, but I say to you Y..." As you read 5:17-20, you might consider what you know about *grace*. How do you reconcile what Jesus is saying here about the law and righteousness (living as God would have us live) with what you understand of grace?

5) In 5:21-26, Jesus begins by talking about murder but ends up talking about anger in general and the need to forgive and reconcile. Is forgiveness and reconciliation difficult for you? Will you do it without condition or only under certain circumstances/with certain people? Why? Jesus wants us to love *everyone*—what role does forgiveness play in your ability to do that?

6) On the surface, 5:27-30 is about adultery, but consider the extent to which Jesus' words speak to the reality that all human beings are created by God to experience healthy, faithful emotional and physical intimacy with another person. How much sin—not just sexual sin—is rooted in unmet intimacy needs?

7) Jesus' teaching on divorce in 5:31-32 is seen by many as, well, brutal. As you read his words, however, consider them from the standpoint of human relationships in general. To what extent are we human beings inclined to remain committed as long as it's convenient? What difference might it make if we saw intimate relationships (and not just marriage or those of a sexual nature) as covenants where we commit ourselves to (in appropriate ways and to appropriate degrees) living for and with one another?

8) Consider Jesus' words in 5:33-37 as words about *integrity*—the extent to which the life you live matches the faith you profess.

9) Matthew 5:38-41... You may find the handout *Jesus and Non-Violent Resistance* following this week's reading guide helpful.

10) Jesus' words in 5:43-48 about loving our enemies are among the most difficult in all of Scripture. Read them carefully, but then consider this: Jesus tells us that to follow him we must first deny ourselves. The greatest measure of our ability to deny ourselves is our ability to love our enemies—to love the unloveable. Jesus says (5:48) that we are to be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect, which is to say that we are to love one another as God loves us. Think of a person you do (or would) find impossible to love and ask yourself this: why?