

Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ

Lecture 13

Jesus' Teaching concerning Life in God's Kingdom

Introduction

When we think of Jesus' teaching ministry, the first Scripture that may come to mind is the teaching commonly known as "the Sermon on the Mount". It is very probable that Jesus taught these teachings on many occasions, and for that reason, we have these two different passages in the Gospels with related but not identical teaching (cf. Matt.5-7 with Luke 6).

Repetition is one of the fundamentals of good teaching method. If it is good to teach once, then it is good to teach many times as we do not learn and master God's truth on the first hearing. Jesus' disciples (then and now) are dull of hearing, which means that Jesus needs to keep reminding us of His truth until it becomes truly indelibly written on our minds and hearts.

What we read in these two biblical accounts of Jesus' teaching (Matthew and Luke's accounts) were not a copy from a tape-recording made of Jesus' teaching but an accurate and truthful summary of His teaching recorded by different Gospel writers with their own unique touch in language and style. (It is helpful to keep in mind also that Jesus gave His teaching in Aramaic so what we read in the NT in *Koine* Greek is a translation with interpretation by these two authors.) These variations actually add to the authenticity of the biblical story because if all the details were identical in a forced manner, then we would have good reason to question their authenticity.

In this "sermon" or teaching, Jesus sets forth for His disciples many aspects of living as citizens in His kingdom, under His loving rule.

Introductory comments regarding the Sermon on the Mount:

- Jesus' teaching was given, not to the world, but rather to His disciples, i.e. His followers, people who had welcomed and put their trust in Jesus. This means

that the Sermon on the Mount is not a sermon about living a good, moral life addressed to anyone in any society. Rather His teaching is for those whose hearts God has made new and who now belong to His Kingdom. It is for those living under the King's rule, who are called to submit their wills to the King.

- Jesus' teaching in this "sermon" is directed to those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, who enables them to obey Jesus' teaching. Example: how "natural" is it for a man to love his enemies who have inflicted great suffering upon them? This is an act which requires supernatural or divine strength and help, i.e. the help of the Holy Spirit living within a believer.
- Jesus' teaching in this "sermon" isn't just a general sermon but a teaching given within a particular religious context. That context is the Jewish religious context of Jesus' day in which the beliefs, teaching and religious practices of the Pharisees, the scribes and Sadducees dominated Judaism. Jesus gives His teaching about obeying God from the heart against the backdrop of the external obedience of the Pharisees and other religious leaders. Jesus' message focuses our attention upon right attitudes, right motives and right beliefs, not just right actions.
- Jesus' teaching in this "sermon" as well as in every other part is thoroughly rooted in the OT Scriptures. Nothing that Jesus teaches in this "sermon" is in conflict with any OT teaching but rather a true interpretation of an OT teaching / law. Through Jesus, God gives fresh understanding concerning His ways and laws. Jesus interprets and applies the OT Law to the minds and needs of His followers
- Jesus' teaching was for His followers then and now.

Luke 6:20-49 – TRUE BLESSEDNESS

- The blessed ones in God's kingdom: vs. 20-26 – cf. OT references to the blessed ones, eg Psalm 1:1; 119:1-2. To be "blessed" in life has been and always will be the deepest longing of the human heart. Generally in the world, "blessedness" is associated with having certain temporal and material "blessings", eg having a happy marriage and healthy, intelligent and good-looking children; having wealth and prosperity; having work. Also to be "blessed" is understood as not suffering from sickness (personal or family); not being cursed by poverty etc.
 - Against the backdrop of a very different belief system, also against the backdrop of the painful realities and struggles of their present

circumstances both from his immediate listeners as well as the first century believers both Jewish and Gentile, Jesus teaches His followers who the truly “blessed” person in truth is and with His teaching He brings hope and encouragement to all His hearers who were mostly from among the “little (insignificant) people” in their society, also the despised and rejected:

- the poor (absolutely destitute, in a dire and hopeless condition of poverty – notice that in contrast to Matthew here, Jesus does not say “poor in spirit”) – yours is the Kingdom of heaven:
 - Poverty does not make anyone happy; in fact, dire poverty is normally a very miserable existence – so Jesus is not teaching people that it is better if you are “poor” – but that in the kingdom of God, poverty often is a blessing because in this helpless, hopeless state, people have only one Person to whom they can look for help.
 - the hungry (starving – literally or spiritually) – you will be satisfied.
 - those who weep (mourning – full of sorrows and difficulties in this life) – you will laugh.
 - those who are hated/despised/ostracised (because of Jesus and righteousness) – be glad & leap for joy.
- Jesus then contrasts their situation with the circumstances of those who have it all their way now – who appear to have life all their way, who appear to be the truly “happy” ones according to the opinion of people. Jesus teaches His disciples that in reality, these people are the “cursed” (“Woe to you ...” – cf. Luke 11:52; 17:1). Jesus is warning His followers *not* to seek after those things or to be jealous of those who have all the “good things” in this world (cf. Ps.73):
- the rich (the materially rich and prosperous – a theme in Luke’s Gospel that we will return to) – all you have now is all you will have – when this life is finished, you will also be finished!
 - the well-fed (related to having riches, eg like the tax-collectors who could accumulate much wealth and so live in ease) – you will soon be hungry.
 - those who laugh now (those who seek after fun and thrills in this world, using the typical stimulants that the world uses to get their laughs) – you will mourn and weep.

- when people speak well of you (those who are popular, who seek after a reputation and name for themselves, who parade around among people in order to impress people) – beware lest you suffer a similar fate to the judgment God meted out upon the OT false prophets.
- Jesus’ hearers were mostly people whose worldly circumstances were dark and difficult in the present world (i.e. the poor and powerless) – Jesus does not offer them a here and now kingdom in which they are assured of the sought after material blessings = that they will be rich, well-fed, having all the good things in this life, loved and liked by all, with no anxieties in the world. Rather He promises that in this life, they will have troubles, difficulties, sorrows, rejection et al. However, the true blessedness in HIS kingdom is primarily reserved for the kingdom still to come (cf. Acts 1:6 *“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”* – all the blessings promised are stated in the future tense: “You will be”)
- This means that Jesus gives no promise or guarantee that His followers will experience these material blessings in this world. His interpretation and the interpretation of the NT as a whole is that the here and now promised blessings in God’s kingdom are SPIRITUAL rather than material because God’s kingdom is for the moment hidden and spiritual. The coming kingdom is the kingdom of God when God’s people will enjoy all the riches of their inheritance in Christ with Jesus, our King:
 - There are some Christian teachers today who teach that the OT promises of prosperity, wealth, health, healing, etc. may be claimed as blessings by God’s NT believers. See Deut.28; Lev.26.
 - Jesus teaches and so does the apostle Paul and the other NT apostles that in this present life (living as citizens in an earthly kingdom), all God’s true people will suffer the very things that Jesus mentioned in His Sermon:
 - poverty
 - famine
 - physical health, weakness, sickness
 - tribulations, rejection, hatred, persecution
 - If the early believers in the first century (cf. Acts) experienced such trials and difficulties, and did not “claim” material prosperity, wealth

and physical well-being as promised blessings, then to teach God's people today that they can "claim" these by faith is nothing short of deception which results in disillusionment with God and His Gospel. Study John 15:18-19; 16:33; Rom.8:35-36; 2 Cor.4:7-10; 6:4-10; 12:10-12; 1 Peter 2:18ff; 4:12ff.

Luke 6:27-38 – ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ENEMIES

- Jesus clearly taught His followers to expect that they would face severe persecution which was the experience of the early church believers. This teaching was an actual rather than a future possibility for them. He spoke openly about His own coming sufferings and warned His followers that they would need to deny themselves and take up their cross, and that they must not shrink back from the experiences of rejection and suffering as His followers.
- How should Jesus' people respond to their enemies when after He has returned to His Father, they would be hated because of their love for Jesus, including being ostracised from the Jewish synagogues? Should they take up arms and physically resist their enemies, overpowering them with a show of force? Luke 6:27ff contains Jesus' instructions to His disciples about how they should respond to their enemies:
 - Love your enemies – vs.27a,35
 - Do good to those who hate you – v.27b
 - Bless those who curse you – v.28a
 - Pray for those who mistreat you – v.28b
 - Don't defend yourself against those who hit you – give the other cheek – v.29a
- Jesus also teaches His followers to love others with the same kind of love that they have already witnessed in Him:
 - If someone takes away a coat, then don't resist – give them also your shirt – v.29b-30
 - Treat others in the same way that you wish that they will treat you – with genuine love and respect – don't love others in the same self-centred way that normal people ("sinners") do – v.31
 - Do good deeds not just to your friends but also to others who cannot repay you – v.33

- Lend to others including those who cannot repay you – be kind hearted, not miserly or mean-spirited – v.34
- The model or example to follow is the Father in heaven whose love for all mankind including those who have turned their hearts away from Him manifests itself in His doing good to them, allowing them to enjoy many of the things of this world, showing them mercy when they deserve punishment for their sin and rebellion against His will – vs.35-36
- Further instructions:
 - Do not judge – and you won't be judged – see also vs.37, 41-42
 - Pardon (forgive) – and you will be pardoned – v.37c (cf. Matt.6:14; Luke 23:16; Acts 3:13)
 - Give – and it will be given to you generously, abundantly – v.38 (cf. 2 Cor.9:8) 6:38 *Love manifests itself in giving (see John 3:16; Eph. 5:25). The Christian ministry is a ministry of expenditure. Those who **give** generously are rewarded generously. The picture is of a man with a large apron-like fold in the front of his garment. He uses it for carrying seed. The more widely he broadcasts the seed, the greater his harvest. He is rewarded with **good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over**. He receives it **into his bosom**, that is, into the fold of his garment. It is a fixed principle in life that we reap according to our sowing, that our actions react upon us, that **the same measure** we **use** to others is **measured back** to us. If we sow material things we reap spiritual treasures of inestimable value. It is also true that what we keep we lose, and what we give we have.*¹
- The heart of Jesus' teaching about our enemies is that His followers are to love them – v.35.

F. B. Meyer explains:

In its deepest sense love is the prerequisite of Christianity. To feel toward enemies what others feel toward friends; to descend as rain and sunbeams on the unjust as well as the just; to minister to those who are unprepossessing and repellent as others minister to the attractive and winsome; to be always the same, not subject to moods or fancies or whims; to suffer long; to take no

¹MacDonald, W., & Farstad, A. 1997, c1995. *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* . Thomas Nelson: Nashville

account of evil; to rejoice with the truth; to bear, believe, hope, and endure all things, never to fail—this is love, and such love is the achievement of the Holy Spirit. We cannot achieve it ourselves.^{16 2}

Other teaching themes:

- The heart – vs.39-45 – the mouth reveals what is in the heart.
- The “wise” in God’s kingdom (linked with the OT wisdom literature; also with Col.2:2-4) – vs.46-49 – to acknowledge Jesus as LORD means that you acknowledge in real life His Lordship and Kingship over every area of your life. The one who does that is wise. He is the one who hears Jesus’ teaching and receives it, acting on His instructions and in this way, he builds his life on a strong and unshakable foundation so that when he faces the pressure of strong and contrary winds (cf. Jesus’ teaching in the Parable of the Sower), he will continue to stand. The opposite is the case for those who listen only to Jesus’ teaching and then forget it, continuing to do just as he pleases and thinks best. Such people are “foolish” (“foolish” in keeping with the OT understanding of moral and spiritual foolishness in the Wisdom literature, eg Proverbs). Even though they may call Jesus Lord, but that is just an empty confession. The end of such people is slow but certain destruction.
- Humility in God’s kingdom: 14:7-14
- The greatest in the kingdom: 9:46-48
- The greatest is the least: 22:24-30

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¹⁶ (6:27–29a) F. B. Meyer, *The Heavens*, p. 26.

²MacDonald, W., & Farstad, A. 1997, c1995. *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* . Thomas Nelson: Nashville