

BaptistWay Bible Series for Dec. 5: Jesus teaches followers how to be disciples_112204

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Jesus teaches followers how to be disciples

Matthew 5:1-16

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In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus features as both a teacher and a healer (4:23; 9:35). BaptistWay lessons for this quarter focus upon the former. Specifically, over the course of the next 13 weeks, we will consider Jesus' instructions as presented by Matthew in chapters 5-7, 10, 13, 18 and 23-25.

The initial unit, which is comprised of five lessons, examines the "Sermon on the Mount," the first of the five discourses of Jesus recorded in Matthew's Gospel. Many believers consider this careful and artful compilation of Jesus' teaching to be the center from which all else Christian emanates. If such an emphasis places too much weight upon these chapters, it nevertheless rightly highlights the significance of this sermon and the vital role it has played in shaping Christian doctrine and ethics.

“The Sermon on the Mount,” whose name is derived from Jesus being situated on the side of a mountain when delivering this discourse (5:1), is comprised of a brief introduction (vv. 1-2), nine beatitudes (vv. 3-12), a metaphorical depiction of disciples as salt and light (vv. 13-16), an extended section concerning the disciples' relationship to the law in light of Jesus' interpretation of the law (vv. 17-48), instructions regarding the proper practice of righteousness (6:1-18), teaching about worldly wealth and earthly worries (vv. 19-34), admonitions on appropriate conduct and prayer (7:1-12), a series of warnings (vv. 13-27) and a succinct conclusion (7:28-29). This week's lesson focuses upon 5:1-16.



At the conclusion of chapter 4, Matthew reports that Jesus became widely known in both Galilee and Syria because of his teaching and healing ministry (vv. 23-24). Furthermore, the Gospel indicates Jesus attracted sizeable crowds from all around as he went about proclaiming and inaugurating the kingdom of God/heaven (v. 25).

While Matthew prefers to use “kingdom of heaven” to refer the rule of God made manifest in and through Jesus' mission and person—the phrase occurs 32 times in Matthew and not at all in Mark and Luke—Mark and Luke employ the more or less synonymous “kingdom of God”—the phrase appears 45 times in Mark and Luke but only five times in Matthew.

Although great crowds flocked to Jesus, his message from the mountain, a revelatory location in Matthew (4:8; 8:1; 15:29; 17:1, 9; 24:3; 28:16), was (and is) directed primarily to his disciples (5:1). However, all who are blessed with eyes to see and ears to hear may become his faith-filled followers (13:16-17). That Jesus sat as he taught was in keeping with rabbinical practice in his day (5:1; 23:2; 24:3; Luke 4:20; 5:3).

“The Sermon on the Mount” commences with Jesus extending congratulations (“blessed are”) to those who: are poor (or contrite) in spirit (v. 3), mourn (over sin?) (v. 4), are meek (or humble) (v. 5), hunger and thirst for righteousness (v. 6), and are merciful (v. 7), pure (or singular) in heart (v. 8), peacemakers (v. 9) and persecuted (vv. 10-12).

It is probable that Jesus' radical reconfiguration of what constitutes the truly fortunate, happy and good life mystified his original audience at least as much as it has subsequent ones. Paradox permeates the beatitudes and the whole of the Christian life.

What prompted Jesus to applaud people of such deportment and lot? One reason the teacher from Nazareth could pronounce such people blessed is that they would have been embracing values that characterized Christ and his kingdom. Restricting ourselves to Matthew's Gospel alone, we discover Jesus as “poor in spirit” (26:36-46), mournful (23:37-39), meek (11:28-30), hungering and thirsting after righteousness (4:1-11; 21:12-13), merciful (9:10-13; 12:7; 18:33; 23:23), pure in heart (11:29; 16:21), a peacemaker (26:52) and persecuted (26:47-27:56). Those who emulate Jesus' character and conduct are blessed—if not here, in the hereafter.

In addition to Jesus' moral vision, one also may explain the beatitudes by taking into consideration Jesus' conviction that God will in due course reverse the adversities and inequities that may well typify the lives of those who dare to be his disciples.

Although Jesus' faithful followers already participate in “the kingdom of heaven” (5:3, 10), the consummation of his kingdom awaits the righteous intervention of God. Until such a time, Jesus has instructed us to pray “Our Father in heaven ... Your kingdom come” (6:9-10).

Following the reiteration and contextualization of the eighth beatitude (v. 11-12), Jesus likens his disciples to salt (v. 13). Salt can serve a variety of

functions, including seasoning and preserving food. Salt that has been tainted, however, no longer is useful. Disciples worth their salt do not compromise their commitment to Christ and his lordship, even in times of duress.

Jesus' followers do not conceal light; they, like a city on a hill and a lamp upon a stand, shine light so others might see (vv. 14-15). Specifically, believers engage in good works so others might be led to give the heavenly Father glory (v. 16). The heavenly Father as a perfect Father sees our secrets, hears our prayers, knows our needs and forgives our sins (5:48; 6:4, 6, 9, 12, 14-15, 18, 32; 7:11). This is the God who was and is revealed in Jesus.

Will Jesus be revealed in us? A needy world awaits our positive response to the radical discipleship to which we have been called.

Discussion question

- ◆ Which of Jesus' teachings did you need to be reminded of?

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.