

Following
the way of
the Master

–

Becoming
a Disciple
of Christ

May 1

2005

A work and commentary produced by Jeff Borden for a group Bible Study

Commentary
from Matthew's
Gospel and
Sermon on the
Mount.

By Jeff Borden

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Commentary from Matthew’s Gospel and Sermon on the Mount

Jeff Borden

Matthew 5:1-16 [Lesson 23 – Matthew, The Gospel of...]

(Commentary by Jeff Borden)

¹Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ²and he began to teach them saying: ³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

An unexplainable level of excitement comes over me when I consider these opening verses of this account of the teachings of Jesus. Although there are other scriptural references of Jesus teaching...there is a certain mystique surrounding this particular account for me. My imagination carries me away and I find myself taken back in time to land of ancient Israel. In my mind’s eye, I can see myself following the crowd up the mountainside to hear the words of Jesus. As he begins to speak I carefully consider his words; “blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. As I consider these words I ask myself; am I poor in spirit, and what does poor in spirit truly mean? Poor in spirit...brings to my memory the thought of someone that does not think highly of themselves; a person that does not consider themselves above others with a haughty attitude, or arrogant. The person that is poor in spirit recognizes that in the shadow of God they are nothing, and without His mercy and His grace there would be no hope for existing at all. Am I poor in spirit? The truthful answer to that question can only be answered with no. I might add as a qualifier that on any given day I exhibit signs of this heart attitude, but that does not truly exemplify the heart of one that is poor in spirit...it only makes for a poor attempt at excusing myself from living with that constant state of heart.

I’m shaken from my despair of how short I fall from being poor in spirit with the Master’s words again. This time I hear him say; “blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”. My heart leaps with cautious joy...Yes; I mourn. I mourn as I recognize my own weakness and wretchedness of being. I mourn as I wrestle with the thing that is “self”. I will be comforted? The thought lifts me from despair as I consider that there is hope for my soul. I recognize my desire to be considered a disciple of Jesus, and I long to be counted amongst his followers as children of the Living God, but I recognize how short I fall from the mark. Now he says; “I will be comforted...” as I mourn my own weaknesses, I am driven to Him for mercy...I desire His grace. His words to me; “fear not my child, I will comfort you”.

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Jesus’ words ring out across the mountainside and I hear him continue with his blessings. He says; “blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth”. Suddenly I become aware that the “blessings” are building blocks of sorts. Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are those that mourn...and now blessed are the meek. As individual blessings, the meanings may have a different interpretation entirely, but taken as a collective whole a different picture begins to emerge. Rather than conjure an understanding of weakness from “meek,” I sense a person that is without the need to “prove” himself. Perhaps the person whose ego has died...in that respect, there is no need to be defensive with respect to any situation or circumstance. Thus, one might portray that person as “meek”. The final analysis puts forth the understanding that this person leaves everything to God – their self, their rights, their cause (whatever that may be) and their future...all in the hands of God. They have learned to say as the Apostle Paul; “...but whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ”. It is at this point that the man has in a sense already inherited the earth, for he is truly satisfied. Nothing can be taken from him for he has already counted it loss. He is content. He is blessed...I am blessed.

⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. ⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. ¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

As Jesus continues his lesson, I sense a strange awareness of who I am coming over me. The person that I considered myself to be does not truly exist, and the unexplained insatiable desire to search for truth is, in an odd way, beginning to be satisfied. I’m shaken from my thoughts as I hear Jesus speak again...”blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled”. Wow! Is this not what I was just describing??? I am beginning to feel myself be “filled”. Righteousness is my desire. Righteousness is my hunger. I want to know my God and I want to become like Him. However, this desire is not the sum of the answer...No; I understand now the order in which Jesus speaks to me today. In order for me to be satisfied in my hunger for righteousness; for it to be a real hunger and not just a superficial desire, I must be poor in spirit. My poorness of spirit drives me to the feet of my God in mourning; mourning for my soul at the wretchedness of my condition, and begging Him for mercy. As He comforts me I find that all of my desires have become

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naught. I am found complete in the shadow of His comfort. I find myself in need for nothing but His grace and a feeling of meekness envelopes my being. I do not have cause to defend or prove myself of anything. I have peace and I have been filled. My all in all is found in my Lord and my Savior.

As this awareness comforts my soul, I hear him say; 'blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. And, blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God'. Yes; he speaks truth again...for I sense this as real and happening even now. Having experienced this feeling of satisfaction and joy in my Lord, I want others to have this fullness as well. Is this not merciful? I don't feel hatred or anger toward anyone...I have no outstanding debts to repay for anyone's wrongs committed against me. I have forgiven with impunity. This is mercy...is it not? It must be true, for I have never known the mercy that I feel at this moment. I am free...and I want others to know this freedom as well. It seems to me that these blessings are all interconnected. I feel sure that my motives are pure and my intent has no ulterior design. I simply want to know and see my God. I feel sure that is happening. I never want to "not" see Him. Perhaps as long as my heart is pure, I will...He says that this is true. I will continue to seek Him so that it remains a reality to me.

Jesus is talking about those that are peacemakers being sons of God. What might a peacemaker really be? I consider it to be one that does not cause strife or conflict...how might this look though? It must stem from these descriptions of blessings that Jesus is talking of today. I will consider my definition with that as my foundation. The peacemaker then has a new view of the world. The peacemaker is the man who does not talk about people when they are offensive and difficult. He does not ask, "Why are they like that?" He understands that they are like that because they are still being governed by the god of this world...the spirit that works in the children of disobedience. The poor person is a victim of self and of Satan. In that light, the peacemaker has pity and mercy upon him. At that moment, he is capable of helping that person and is likely to make peace with him. Continuing that thought, it also means an entirely new view of the world. The peacemaker has only one concern, and it is the glory of God amongst men. That was the Lord Jesus' only concern. His one interest in life was not Himself, but the glory of God. Moreover, the peacemaker is the man whose central concern is the glory of God. He spends his life in trying to minister to that glory. He knows that God make man perfect, and that the world was meant to be Paradise, so when he sees disputes and quarrelling, he sees something that is detracting from the glory of God. This is the thing that concerns him, nothing else. Lastly, and in a practical sense, as peacemakers, we should be endeavoring to diffuse peace wherever we are. This is done by being selfless, by

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showing love, and by being approachable. If we do not think of self at all, people will feel that we are approachable. They will know that they will get sympathy and understanding. They will know that they will get an unbiased outlook. In that, the peacemaker will be able to minister the gospel of Christ and the captives will be set free receiving peace. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God."

What is this...he's talking of persecutions and insults now; from being a peacemaker to being persecuted. But it seems fitting...as his blessings come together. Everything that the Master has spoken of today is contrary to what I have been taught. I know that it is truth as my heart and spirit bear witness to it, but those that do not know the Master will despise this teaching. Therefore, it makes sense that as I model this truth in my daily existence...I will sense and become the object of wrath of many. Oddly enough, this brings a sense of delight to me...not in a way of masochistic pleasure or asceticism, but in the sense that I have been identified with my Lord. And...you know what??? As I am identified with Him, I am found with Him...and will live with Him in heaven for eternity.

¹³"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. ¹⁴"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Salt and Light...no disconnect from the heart to the life; "...out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks". As I believe, so shall I live...Jesus said; "if you love me, you will obey what I command". Do I obey, or do I make excuses for my disobedience? The end result is a stark truth; I will exhibit the depth of what I hold true in my daily walk. I will make a difference if I believe this teaching of Jesus to be true...if I have encountered a true meeting with Him and believe Him to be true as well, I will be changed. My heart will be renewed and my spirit regenerated...and everyone (I mean everyone) will know it.

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Matthew 5:17-48 [Lesson 24 – Matthew, The Gospel of...]

(Commentary by Jeff Borden)

¹⁷“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

“...I have not come to abolish them (the Law) but to fulfill them.” I have often considered these words of Jesus. I have also wondered at the motivation of man to draw distinction between the Old Testament teaching and the gospel message of the New Testament. I say this by way of referencing my own ideas to scripture having also been one of those persons that would attempt to draw distinction between the two periods (OT and NT). In the not too distant past, I have come to a different conclusion altogether with regard to scripture. I do not define the story that is God’s unfolding relationship with man as one that is built using separate and distinct materials which are capable of standing on their own. On the contrary, I perceive this unfolding relationship to be a multiplicity of experiences that culminates in a robust revelation which is Jesus. The robust revelation that is Jesus has been the common integer throughout this entire unfolding story. As such, the revelation can scarcely be understood in its totality if any component is missing from the story. The scriptures give us a view into this truth; reference the gospel of John chapter one:

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

John 1:1-5 [NIV]

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So then, to summarize, Jesus is the Word. Jesus was with God from the very beginning...and Jesus is God. Through Jesus all things were made; and nothing was made that was not made by Him. I find it difficult to speak against the rationale that this statement puts forth. Can we not assume from this statement that it was Jesus who gave to man the Law of God? Consider this, John also writes that “in him (Jesus) was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.” Now, let us review again the purpose of the Law:

¹⁹What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.

Galatians 3:19 [NIV]

Could we then extrapolate that perhaps Jesus (The Light) by way of the Law “shines” so that men might be “illuminated” to that which is truth? Our answer lies in the writing of the Apostle Paul to the Romans:

⁷What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law.

Romans 7:7 [NIV]

It is from these scriptures (and similar others) that I draw my conclusion. Christ is the Law as much as He is Grace. It is my understanding that one cannot exist without the other...at least with consideration of the fall of Adam. Again, our context must be reiterated to understand the entire counsel of the unfolding relationship between God and man. Is it any wonder then that Jesus states, “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” It is because the Law is a component of the whole...“I have come to fulfill the Law.” Perhaps my best explanation of the Law might be to describe it as a shadow of the Messiah. A person is capable of describing in general terms the object that casts the shadow, but without a perfect view or direct contact with the object itself...they are incapable of giving an accurate description with high level details. Such is the case and the purpose of the Law. The Law brought man to an awareness of God (Jesus) and sent him (man) searching for what the object was that cast the shadow (Law). We know through the revelation of Jesus and the unfolding story that Jesus is the object that cast the shadow.

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Finally, it is my conclusion that I cannot be at odds with the Law. It is not a thing to be despised any more than my Savior can be despised. Although the Law had a specific purpose, it is still the essence of my Lord.

²¹"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' ²²But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. ²³"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. ²⁵"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. ²⁷"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' ²⁸But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Jesus said if anyone breaks one of the least of the commandments or teaches anyone to do the same, he will be called least in the kingdom of Heaven. At first glance this seems to be a fairly obvious and understandable statement. However, I believe that there is a much greater truth that exists under the surface application. First we need to acknowledge the supposedly obvious explanation of this statement. Simply put, that would be errant teaching and those things obviously at odds with the commandments of God. I should think that it is not the obvious that Jesus was referring to at this juncture when taken into consideration the earlier exposition given with the teachings of the beatitudes. So what might the essence of this statement be? The saying “actions speak louder than words” comes immediately to mind as a reply to that question. The next statement that Jesus makes following this one makes testimony to that thought. He says, “Whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven”. He says, “practices and teaches;” which leaves the understanding that what we do as his followers is the substance of what we are teaching. Therefore, if we break

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his commands and live as willfully disobedient children...we are teaching those that watch and follow after us to do the same. I think that there is no other way of interpreting this statement...it stands on its own.

Jesus begins to expand a little on some of the finer points of the law in the following scriptures (Matt. 5:21-30). More than measuring the surface content and application of the Law, Jesus “pops open the hood” and examines the inner workings of the Law putting it on display for the uneducated (man) to study. The bar is raised exponentially higher as Jesus describes the spirit of God’s perfect Law. (Once again I will remind the reader that Jesus is, in fact, the Law Giver – who better then to understand and teach it in its fullness???) Jesus tells us anger is equivalent to murder; having contempt for a brother, is as good as a sentence to hell. He goes on; adultery does not have to be a physical act, but can merely take place in one’s mind. He tells us that holding a grudge or not settling grudges held against us can cut us off from the ears of God...and he tells us that if there be any identifiable obstacle that stands between us and God, we should get rid of it. He equates this last statement with the following advice:

“If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.”

Matthew 5:29 [NIV]

Should we gouge out our eyes and cut off our hands...I cannot speak for anyone other than myself. However, I might qualify the statements made by Jesus in this way. Is he speaking literally? I believe that he is doing so...speaking literally that is. If my eye, hand, or anything else for that matter would separate me from eternity with my God, it is not worth having; period. Now, to further that statement...is it necessary? I do not think so; you see, at the time that Jesus was speaking, the Holy Spirit had not yet come. With the advent of the dispensation of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God, man now has the ability to overcome these lusts and issues with sin. Scripture clearly supports this thought. So then, the question might be better phrased: “Are you considering your only option to overcome the lust that is within you or temptations of your hands to be eradication of the offensive members???” If so, perhaps considering the gift of God’s Holy Spirit might be a viable alternative. Also, it might be considered that the offensive member is not the eye or the hand after all...remember Jesus saying that it is not the act of adultery that is the sin, but the conception of lust in the mind that takes root in the heart. With this thought, we might consider the renewing of our minds to be the remedy.

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³¹"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' ³²But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

Quite simply, with regard to Jesus' statements regarding marriage, the majority of humanity does not have the faintest idea of what it is meant to be or what it actually represents. The Apostle Paul even refers to it as "...a profound mystery" (Ephesians 6:32). The mystery he refers to is the parallel of the human institution of marriage and the spiritual union of Christ and the Church. It is my heartfelt conviction that the human institution is symbolic of what has been ordained since before the creation of the earth itself. As such, marriage does not have its roots in the physical realm at all, but it has been established as a spiritual bond that precedes even Adam and Eve. It is the single bonding of spiritual souls with Christ...becoming "one flesh" with God. A mystery indeed... With regard to the teaching of Moses and the teaching of Paul pertaining to marriage, we are given the echo of the great and wonderful mystery of the unifying of souls. What is given by Moses and by Paul is strictly according to the structure and wickedness of man. Jesus, when tested by the teachers of the law, stated this truth as follows:

³Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" ⁴"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' ⁵and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?' ⁶So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." ⁷"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" ⁸Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. ⁹I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

¹⁰The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." ¹¹Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.

¹²For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage^[c]because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

Matthew 19:3-12 [NIV]

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The starkness of Jesus' words in light of the teachings of Moses and Paul seem very unforgiving. We must understand that the fact remains that we (man) have taken something (marriage) that has a representative meaning with roots seated in the heavens and corrupted it by our own sinful nature. This was a great sin simply of itself. The fact that it is before God as a constant reminder of the unfaithfulness of His creation is not a matter lacking in seriousness. So, as the "Law" of Moses and the words of Paul go, there are legal precedents for divorce. However, with the clarification from the heart of God through the Word, which is Jesus...there is a much narrower gate.

³³"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' ³⁴But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; ³⁵or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

³⁸"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' ³⁹But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴²Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Jesus makes some interesting statements regarding the taking, or making of oaths. More light can be shed by understanding the culture in which Jesus was speaking. The Mosaic Law forbade irreverent oaths, light use of the Lord's name, and broken vows. Once Yahweh's name was invoked, the vow to which it was attached became a debt that had to be paid to the Lord. A sophisticated doctrine judged how binding an oath really was by examining how closely it was related to Yahweh's name. Incredible distinctions proliferate under such an approach. Swearing by heaven and earth was not binding, nor was swearing by Jerusalem, though swearing toward Jerusalem was. That an entire mishnaic tract is given over to the subject shows that such distinctions became important and were widely discussed. Thus, we have the statements of reference by Jesus alluding to the types of oaths not to make before God. More importantly, we get from Jesus, the heart of Creator with respect to oaths. In essence, any oath made is binding to God...for everything is created by Him and is subject to Him. He goes on to add that hearts that beat in obedience to God as His children and followers, a simple yes

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or no is sufficient. The implication of anything other than a “yes” or “no” is reason to believe that deception is the norm. Simply put, as followers of Christ, our actions should be our “yes” or “no” is sufficient to bind a contract.

The continuation of Jesus’ discourse on spirituality takes an interesting turn as it touches a much more physical aspect of the daily life in verses 38-42. My first impressions involve visions of radical pacifism, and I’m not completely unsure if that is not what my ultimate conclusions include. Jesus puts forth a series of examples beginning with a reference to the Mosaic Law; “eye for an eye...” He continues with his second reference of being slapped on the cheek. However there is a cultural truth that is lost on the average western man in this case. The “slap” as it were, was not merely a physical attack, but was also a form of public insult. Jesus stated that we, as followers, weren’t only to take the insult...but to offer ourselves up for more of the same. In the following examples of someone suing you to “take the shirt off your back,” and the Roman practice of forcing civilian labor for matters of the state (...someone forces you to go one mile), Jesus makes reference to matters of civil law. Certainly there was a legal binder that most persons were expected to follow regarding these examples. Jesus went beyond the expectations of the law and encouraged his followers to set themselves apart by exceeding the expectations...showing themselves to be different. This exemplifies the spirit of love above all things. Does this imply that Christians should always allow themselves to be taken advantage of...being an “easy mark” as it were??? I have to wonder if that is even possible for the person who “...has counted all things as loss” (Philippians 3:7-9). In conclusion I can only say one thing to this teaching of Jesus; the bar is set high. Is it attainable; can the mark be reached? I suppose that it can, or it would not be given to us as the expected heart attitude. This only serves to reinforce the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit of God to provide the means and the overcoming power to exhibit the heart attitude that Jesus encourages. It is not merely enough to equate to the “righteousness of the Pharisees” by squelching the inner feelings of not wanting to comply and fulfilling only the letter of the law with compliance before the eyes of men. Jesus said, “...unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees...”

⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷And if you greet

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only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Jesus completes the first portion of the Sermon on the Mount with the closing verses of chapter 5 in Matthew's gospel. The essence of this summary will be the embodiment of the kingdom message which is love. It (love) is not only exemplified in our manner toward God, or those that are considered like-minded, but as Jesus teaches, it is an attitude that is purveyed in every direction that is centered from the heart that is born of God. In interesting concept and truth is submitted by Jesus beginning in verse 44; he says, "...but I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven." It is interesting that those that are outside of God's great salvation are considered His enemies (James 4:4), yet God loves us still as it is not His desire for any to perish (2 Peter 3:9). My conclusions are that God simply wants us to be models of Him...He wants to see Himself in us. Therefore, Jesus instructs us to have the same heart of love as the Father; in this we will show ourselves to be sons of our Father in heaven. Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Is it realistic to think that we can be, therefore, perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect? I say yes; without doubt there is a way. The very spirit that raised my Jesus from the dead is available to raise me from death as well. It is available to make alive in me the love that holds this universe together. The question is not whether or not it is possible, but rather...whether I will allow that power to work in me by submitting myself wholly to the work that God wishes to do in me.

Matthew 6:1-18 [Lesson 25 – Matthew, The Gospel of...]

(Commentary by Jeff Borden)

¹"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. ²"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

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Jesus, having described the character of the child of God in the Beatitudes and elaborating on the law as it is interpreted from a spiritual perspective, now goes on to clarify responsive actions from the believer. He starts with acts of righteousness. First, it may help to understand what Jesus is talking about, by defining what righteousness is. Righteousness can easily become a subjective interpretation...the word itself is rather general in what it encompasses. Therefore, what is “righteous” for one person may not be defined as righteous for another. So, what did Jesus mean when he referred to “acts of righteousness”? As I studied this particular word to gain deeper understanding, I found no less than three different interpretations from various English translations. All of these translations were using Greek texts and words to interpret the meaning. One version used the phrase “merciful deeds” (eleemosune; gr.) literally meaning the act of giving. Another version used the phrase “charitable deeds,” or “alms” before men...both of which leave different imagery in my mind. Finally, another version actually used the word righteousness; translated from the Greek (dikaiosune), which means in a broad sense the state of him who is as he ought to be, righteousness, the condition acceptable to God: (1) the doctrine concerning the way in which man may attain a state approved of God. (2) Integrity, virtue, purity of life, rightness, correctness of thinking feeling, and acting. Although I was beginning to get an understanding of what Jesus was meaning by righteousness, I was not completely satisfied having seen multiple English interpretations from several Greek words. I found interesting insight from a resource that is true to the Hebrew and Jewish cultural roots. The following is what I found:

Rabbi Eliezer Ben-Yehuda wrote “The Hebrew word ‘Mitzvah’ – which has no exact translation, and is rendered in different contexts as ‘good deed,’ ‘law’ or ‘command,’ can also be taken to mean ‘duty’ or ‘obligation’ – a concept which becomes the key to Jewish law.” The expression in the Greek is normally translated either good deeds or good work, but can include righteousness, because doing righteousness is a common usage. Charitable giving, as in Matthew 6:2, in the Hebrew language is either Tsedekah or Mitsvah. Tsedekah is from the root tsadak, to do right, to be just, and specifically refers to charitable giving. Our salvation is not the result of our works, but it is the cause of our works. You are not made righteous by your works, but do good works because you are righteous. Mitsvot are evidence that you have been made righteous by faith (Genesis 15:6). Good deeds are the evidence of our relationship with God. Jesus said, “you will recognize people by their fruit.” (Matthew 7:16) Paul said, defending himself in Acts 26:19-20 “For which reason, King Agrippa, I have not been disobedient to the heavenly vision

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but first to the heathens, bringing a call to repent and to turn back to God, doing works worthy of repentance.” Works worthy of repentance are also called mitsvot or righteousness.

“Acts of righteousness” then can best be understood as the good works that we do that are a response to the grace we have received from God. As sons and daughters of God, we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). Having stated our case and understanding that we were created by God to do acts of righteousness; why would Jesus tell us not to do them before men? The answer is in understanding Jesus' words. He says to be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them. It is better to understand the intent of his words as interpreted by the Revised Standard Version. It reads as follows:

“Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.”

This interpretation gives us a better understanding of what Jesus was trying to convey to his listeners. What we want to understand is that Jesus is speaking of the motive of our heart relative to our righteous acts, or good deeds. Remember previously in Matthew 5:14, Jesus spoke that we (believers) are salt and light...and we should let our light shine before men in order to bring glory to our Father in heaven. The difference now is directed to those that would do works, good deeds...acts of righteousness simply to bring praises on themselves from the accolades of men. Righteous acts under the rule of God's kingdom and design must be visible so that God may be glorified. The converse is that it must never be visible in order to win the approval of man... It is better by far to hide any righteous act that may lead to pretension. The goal is to bring glory to God by good works born out of love for Him. To trade the goal of pleasing the Father for the idolatrous and prideful goal of pleasing man is unthinkable. This is the warning of Jesus.

After defining the goal of righteous acts, Jesus now specifically defines an example of one. He uses the example of “secret giving”. It is certain that one consideration of this instruction by Jesus is meant to be with regard to financial giving; however, it is not limited to monetary gifts. Again, Jesus makes mention of the purpose of giving is to be done to fulfill a need. The Spirit of God that dwells within the heart of every believer should be the guide by which we are moved. By this fact there is no need to bring unnecessary attention to the gift or the act of giving. It is not the measure of the applause of man that was the motivation for the gift, or it should not

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be. Once more, secret giving is not limited to strictly financial gifts. Secret giving can take on the form of services as well. In either case, the reward is great in the eyes of God when done strictly as an offering to Him. As much as tithing and offerings are a responsibility of the believer, alms (secret giving) are as much so.

⁵"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹"This, then, is how you should pray: "'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us today our daily bread. ¹²Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' ¹⁴For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

As Jesus continues his discourse we begin to see a theme develop. His opening comments regarded acts of righteousness "before men." Next, he spoke of "giving" to the needy "before men." And now, he speaks of praying "before men". In every case he directs men to examine their hearts in order to determine the motivation for their actions. Am I serving at the food pantry because I will look good in the community; or is it the Christ-like thing to do, and Jesus would want me to help even the "least of these?" Am I making a sizable donation to a mission's need or a disenfranchised family, and writing my check out in public to receive great compliments from the community, or do I make quiet, anonymous arrangements because God's blessings to me have provided the means to meet this particular need? Yes...*why am I* doing what I am doing? Am I responding to God, or performing for men? The next point that Jesus illustrates concerns prayer and once more, he points the listener back to self-examination. Jesus uses some interesting examples to make his point with this illustration. He refers to praying as the hypocrites, and babbling like pagans to draw a very descriptive picture. My personal feelings are that Jesus' instructions do not contradict the need and function of corporate prayer meetings. I say this with the same understanding previously mentioned regarding doing works of righteousness before men (or not doing works...) and "letting your light shine before men". Identifying the theme here is the key to understanding the intent of our Lord's teaching. The question to pose is; "why am I praying aloud?" Am I

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choosing my words because of those that hear me, or am I praying aloud the words in my heart? Jesus states the obvious as a reminder to us; “Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” It would do us well to remember this all important truth. Within this truth lies the reason that God wishes us to pray in the first place...it is not for Him to find out our needs, but rather to spend time with Him to show our dependence and fellowship upon Him. We can do ourselves well to identify our personal need in this area by asking ourselves the question of how much time do we spend with God in personal prayer...the truth that may be realized could be exactly the point that Jesus was attempting to make. Does the time that I spend in corporate prayer amount to more than the time spent alone with God?

In order that his instructions and examples are not misinterpreted, Jesus now gives us the template for our prayers. He says; “This, then, is how you should pray...” and proceeds to dictate what we know as the “Lord’s Prayer.” It is my understanding that Jesus gave us this prayer as a template. That is, a guideline by which we should form our prayers and petitions to God. He gives us relative points in its construction that help us to keep our perspective of the Father and our relation to Him at all times.

During my own analysis of the Lord’s Prayer I have identified some points that are important to me...they are as follows:

- **Our Father in Heaven** – God is above all; there is none greater
- **Hallowed be your name** – God is Holy; He is unique. There is nothing, and no one like Him
- **Your kingdom come** – God’s rule and the establishment of His government is a priority
- **Your will be done** – The desire of God is all important. There should be no question of who is the ruler and authority of all things
- **...On earth as it is in heaven** – the establishment of God’s rule in heaven should extend to His creation on earth. We know that it ultimately will be this way, but for now it is our (those that believe) responsibility to work toward achieving His kingdom here as expeditiously as possible
- **Give us today our daily bread** – Only God has the food that sustains our soul, and it is upon Him that we rely upon receiving it

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- **Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors** – As we recognize the forgiveness we have received from God, we reciprocate forgiveness to those that trespass against us. By acting in accordance with this acknowledgment of God's grace, we have assurance that God's favor continues with us.
- **...Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one** – God is with us. All the while that we are His children, He will not let us be tempted beyond that which we can stand. He has already made a way of escape...and it is in Him.

Now, to clarify my position I must state that I do not believe this prayer to be a liturgy that incurs any additional grace from my heavenly Father. I do believe that it is a foundational truth that I need to recognize, and it (Lord's Prayer) is relative to every word spoken to my Father. I need to remember always who my God is. Certainly I can approach His throne with confidence, but that confidence does not (or cannot) detract from who He is. He is still the God that created all things...He is still Holy beyond comprehension...He is still my Savior that died for my sins...He is so perfect and so pure that no human brain can fathom what that even means. His righteousness and love extend beyond the human vocabulary...He holds the very existence of the universe and all that extends before and beyond it together with His mere word. I have to remember this every time I come to Him in prayer...in praise...for this is also why He is worthy of all my worship.

Who am I to assume anything at all from or of Him...yet He directs me to pray and to ask; I will...and this template that Jesus (who should know better than anyone) gave to us, will help me keep my perspective when I approach my Father's throne.

¹²Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' ¹⁴For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Jesus makes some very significant points regarding forgiveness in the verses 12 through 15. The points that he makes are clear enough; if we do not forgive men for their transgressions, God will not forgive us. There are no other qualifiers given to us by Jesus; therefore, I hazard to say that there are no loopholes, or disclaimers. It seems that what Jesus says, is what he says...and is what it is. What are the ramifications if we do not forgive and hold anger, bitterness and grudges against our fellow man? I cannot say definitively, but I would think that

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what is implied by Jesus' remarks is that we are not forgiven. If we find ourselves to be unforgiven by God, can we then approach His throne with confidence? I think not. It has been my experience that one of the greatest obstacles faced by those calling themselves Christians is forgiveness, or to be more accurate, their inability to forgive. Many have trouble forgiving themselves and believing that God has forgiven them. Many have trouble forgiving others. This single obstacle is one of the greater detriments within the body of the Christian fellowship, and although it is the inclination of many to say that the issues surrounding this issue are many and they are complex...there is an answer. The answer is denying self, or dying to self. When the old self has passed away, and the mind is created new in Christ, forgiveness comes much easier. Forgiveness come immediately for self with the assurance of God's forgiveness, and it comes for others as we recognize the enormity of God's grace and love. And the bottom line is; without forgiveness...there is no Christianity.

¹⁶"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

The final verses of this study involve the teaching of Jesus on the discipline of fasting. Particularly, he simply tells us how to conduct ourselves when we fast. He does not state what the desired outcome or even what the initial purpose for the fast is. In the way that he phrases it; "when you fast..." I can only assume that it is an expected discipline and something that his followers should participate in. As it is understood by me, fasting is generally associated with the depriving of one's self from food. This would imply that there is an exercise of self-denial taking place. Perhaps this is done with the ultimate goal of drawing closer to God; and in that "drawing close" could be many lesser ulterior motives...seeking the mind of Christ regarding _____, prayer for someone or something specific, spiritual growth or deliverance, and/or etc. This would seem to be the greater purpose and ultimate goal for a fast...that by denying the need to cater to the flesh we become reliant on the spiritual provision of God, and as we become less aware of the cries of the flesh, we become more attuned to the word and leading of God. Is it necessary to involve others with our fast? I don't think so; especially with understanding what the initial and ultimate goals are.

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Matthew 6:19-34 [Lesson 26 – Matthew, The Gospel of...]

(Commentary by Jeff Borden)

¹⁹"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²²"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! ²⁴"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

The natural progression of Jesus' message now begins to center on the home front of practicality with this next passage. At first glance the point that Jesus makes is obvious enough and agrees with the wisdom of Solomon in the writings of Ecclesiastes. The futility of amassing worldly possessions is of no value. Jesus points out that eventually we lose, in one way or another, what we amass materially. He advises that it is better to pursue heavenly treasures where what is gained will last for eternity. Looking beyond the obvious though leads one to think about the more esoteric value of this teaching. A person's "treasure" does not necessarily have to be measured with a material value. Jesus states that where your treasure is, there your heart is also...In effect, this could be anything. It seems that it is applicable to anything that might take our concern and focus from the goal of serving our Lord. Is the pursuit of my job or career going to interfere with my service to God; if even for only a season? What then defines the season...? Might God have wished that season entirely for Himself? Is there a hobby, vacation or purchase of some sort that God has determined is better spent upon Him? Have I justified my actions and motives to suit my own desires at the expense of putting God second...third...fourth or further down the priority listing of my life? "You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength – where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Where is my heart? Are there areas of my life that I must make excuses for...or am I wholly and holy devoted to storing my treasure in heaven?

Jesus continues his teaching and moves his subject to the lust of the eye...or does he? To some degree, his teaching is of a staccato-like nature...seemingly disjointed to a point. He was discussing material possessions and our pursuit of them. Now, he speaks about the eye as the "lamp of the body." I consider that there is a

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practical understanding to this teaching as much as there is a metaphorical truth at play. Let me first consider the practical understanding and break down what Jesus is teaching in a literal application.

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”

Literally: The eye is the entry point of light into the body. The body is dependent upon what the light (eye) reveals to it to be enabled to see. This ability to see provides the body with direction and the potential to make decisions on how to move, where to move, plan on how to negotiate obstacles, and etc. The alternative to a “good eye” is one that is bad. The bad eye may not allow “light” in to the body. If there is no light, there is darkness. Where there is darkness, the ability to see is impeded or halted altogether. Perhaps in the best scenario the “bad eye” can only produce confusion.

Metaphorically: Previous to the “eye” illustration, Jesus was talking about treasures and the heart. I assume that his thoughts here are not disjointed even though they may appear so. Considering the illustration of treasures in the context of this illustration as well, gives one the ability to see beyond the surface of what is being expressed. In this case, the eye is truly the heart. It acts as the focal point of where a man’s vision and ambition are. If a man’s ambition and goal-setting are directed toward heaven (e.g. God), then the whole man is illuminated and “good.” Conversely, if a man’s heart is split and operating either on self-serving goals, or dual path goals...then the heart will be confused and in the “dark”. Finally, in this explanation as there is only God and no other *light* than God, we can understand the essence of what Jesus was referring to when he said; “If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness.” Being wholly devoted to God is *the light*...anything less is; “...how great is that darkness.”

If we follow with the line of reasoning we have embarked on, we can now understand the next statement of Jesus; “no one can serve two masters”. Again, there is a surface application and relevant truth. In this particular illustration Jesus expresses the two masters as being God and Money. However, as has been the case throughout this entire passage, there is a second understanding that encompasses a much broader application. As I read the words of Jesus, my first impressions were that his depiction was somewhat harsh. When I consider the words

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hate and despise being used to describe the ability of a person to have diverse attentions, I'm unsure if that is a fair representation. I think; "I can love two things...I can share two interests". But truthfully...can I really? In effect what happens is that my level of attention and the effort that I put forth is subdivided between the two. There is potential for the possibility that I may serve the two interests with 100% of my attention and ability, but in truth my 100% is actually subdivided between them. Perhaps it might better be explained as "load balancing" – yes, I'm putting forth my all, but my all is not put forth toward one goal. Does that make hate or despise a fair assessment? I'm not entirely sure; it seems that it might. When taken into account that if the "load" were not split, 100% of 'me' would be devoted toward that single task/object. What then does that say if my attentions are split? Who then is the real "master"? I'm not truly giving my all to either "master." The reality is...that I am living to serve my own desires. What then does that make me??? Am I a slave to myself? Suddenly I have the vision of a dog chasing his tail...

I believe that the point is clear what Jesus is making the effort to communicate with these several metaphors. Simply put, it is serving God with a whole and unwavering commitment. Our attentions cannot be divided. For our attentions to be divided is to invite failure. "If the eye is dark, how great is that darkness". "Where a man's heart is so is his treasure." "You must love the Lord your God with all of your heart, all of your soul, all of your mind...and all of your strength."

Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. (Exodus 34:14) – Any other god would include us as well.

²⁵"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What

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shall we wear?' ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

I read and meditate upon the words of Jesus in this passage of scripture (Matthew 6:25-32) and a single recurring thought permeates my brain...“Do I trust Him?” I say that I do, but I have to question all the moments of my life. I don't think that God wants us to act foolishly in the context of this scripture. In other words, I don't believe that He wishes us to live a haphazard, carefree, or careless life. I'm sure that it is His desire for us to be responsible in our actions and good stewards of all that He entrusts us with. So, what does Jesus mean for us to understand from his examples? It is my understanding that the thought is for us not to be consumed with the demands of everyday life. We have to live in the world, but as we have been told; “we are not of the world”. Therefore, it is not right for us to be consumed by it, but rather we should be consumed by our devotion and trust in our Lord and Savior. I guess if I were to sum up the essence of what is being espoused here; it would be materialism...maybe even shallow materialism. Yes, it is necessary for us to prepare for and maintain a healthy relationship to the responsibilities of life. However, within the scope of that understanding we must have faith that God will meet our needs in the context of our ability to place our priorities in the proper order. To live neglectful, lazy and apathetic lives is to dishonor God. Maintaining a balance of responsible stewardship and devoted faith to our Lord is the message being conveyed.

In some measure, I think that Jesus is further emphasizing his point in the verses 28-32. However, he goes on to turn up his emphasis to advance our understanding of what stands as the sole reason for anxiety and worry. He says, “O you of little faith”. There is not much in the way of understanding any other explanation for what Jesus says at this point. What stands at the root of worry and anxiety is simply put; disbelief. Jesus expresses the bottom line as being; “your heavenly Father knows what your needs are...why can't you trust Him to meet them?”

³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

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These final verses of chapter 6, and this portion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount bring us back to our starting point again. Jesus gives us the order for our priorities again; "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well". This is stated another way as; "You must love the Lord your God with all of your heart, all of your soul, all of your mind and all of your strength". Setting our priorities in the proper order...not diversifying our efforts...not two-timing our God is the means to a happy and victorious relationship with Him. Putting Him first places everything else in its proper order. Putting God first enables me to joyfully and obediently serve Him. When I serve Him joyfully and obediently, I am filled with the guidance and counsel of the Holy Spirit. My steps are ordered according to the will of God the Father; for I have the mind of Christ. With the mind of Christ I am able to keep a proper perspective on all my responsibilities and the testimony of my witness brings glory to my Lord. There is harmony and peace within my soul. What...who...me worry? You got to be kidding. With what Jesus has going on in me, there is no room for worry.

To conclude; do I think that this is a realistic expectation? That is, to live a worry-free life? I can answer that with an unmitigated and resounding absolutely I DO. Do I worry??? I honestly do not think that I do. I have had anxious moments, and I don't think that they are too far removed from the actual connotation of worry. Having said that, I realize that anxiety and worry are outside the realm of existence with consideration of where my heart lies with my Jesus. Knowing that to be a fact, I will continue to endeavor putting Him first in my life so every other portion of my existence is lined up appropriately and in accordance with His purposes for me.

Matthew 7:1-14 [Lesson 27 – Matthew, The Gospel of...]

(Commentary by Jeff Borden)

¹"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ²For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." ³"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? ⁴How 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? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. ⁶"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.

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Jesus opens the next portion of his discourse with instruction concerning judgment. Verses 1 and 2 are, in my opinion, among the most abused and misunderstood scriptures in the entire Bible. Jesus states; “Do not judge, or you too will be judged.” This passage is most often removed from the context of the entire Bible and used to defend personal sin or behavior unbecoming the child of God. It is also used by those outside of Christianity in the same way. A very common (if not the most popular) reply by an individual confronted with personal sin is; “who are *you* to judge me?” Another common reply is to quote this very passage out of context; “...judge not, lest ye be judged...” However, as I have stated, I do not believe this to be the intent of what Jesus was instructing. Scripture (the entire counsel of God) gives us example after example of what it means to live a holy life. God gives us specific instruction along with the spiritual intent of what it means to refrain from evil practice. Further; we as children of God, are given instructions to confront sin. We are given this instruction in a number of places throughout the church epistles written by the Apostle Paul (see 1 Corinthians 5 and Galatians 6). As well, James writes in his epistle, “Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.” It would seem to me that it is hard for a person to turn from sin without first knowing that they are guilty of it. (Galatians 6:1; 1 Corinthians 5; James 5:20)

⁷“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! ¹²So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

¹³“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

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Matthew 7:15-29 [Lesson 28 – Matthew, The Gospel of...]

(Commentary by Jeff Borden)

¹⁵“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

It is interesting to me that this chapter seems to hold with it a degree of paradox in its teaching. I do not think that it is contradictory, but more akin to a bit of irony perhaps. At the outset of this passage Jesus exhorts us to be careful of judging others...“For in the same way that you judge, so shall you be judged.” That is quite a sobering statement that Jesus makes, and could explain in part why the Christian community is lax in proclaiming truth to the world at large. However; as we dig deeper, Jesus tells us that it is necessary for us to live pure and holy lives according to the authority of God in order that we might help right the paths of others (See Matt. 7:3-5).

Beginning with verse 15 of this passage, Jesus warns us of false prophets and gives descriptions and examples of testing that help us (the believer) to recognize them. It is this passage that interests me and gives me pause to consider the context of this entire chapter. The context of the verses 15-20 unmistakably encourages the believer to examine and determine by visible evidence whether or not some teachers, or members of the flock (“...they come to you in sheep's clothing”) are of God (“thus by their fruit you will recognize them”).

The word, “Judge” in this context (found in 7:1 – Strong's no. 2919) is translated from the Greek verb “Krivnw” (transliteration = Krino / pronounced *kree' no*). It has the following meaning:

1. to separate, put asunder, to pick out, select, choose
2. to approve, esteem, to prefer
3. to be of opinion, deem, think, to be of opinion
4. to determine, resolve, decree

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5. to judge

- a. to pronounce an opinion concerning right and wrong
 1. to be judged, i.e. summoned to trial that one's case may be examined and judgment passed upon it
- b. to pronounce judgment, to subject to censure
 1. of those who act the part of judges or arbiters in matters of common life, or pass judgment on the deeds and words of others

It seems obvious to me that the very thing that Jesus warns of in verse 1 of this chapter he now encourages us to practice. How then do we reconcile this teaching? We must, by virtue of understanding who Jesus is, believe that his teaching is harmonious with his person. My opinion is that our postmodern society and western dialect has been the culprit of our misunderstanding and confusion.

Our modern understanding of “judge” is most often received in the context of “final and authoritative”. To be more precise, it is generally understood more appropriately as if a final verdict has been announced and a sentence passed. True, in some instances, this is what the definitions state according to the verb use from the Greek syntax. Note, however, that in other instances the verb indicates an understanding better aligned with examination. Our dialect and our cultural use of the same has “blurred” and distorted our understanding of what it means to judge and/or examine. The unfortunate effects of this misunderstanding has caused disruption and damage to the maturity of many believers and ultimately leads to greater compromise in the hearts of those that are more mature in their understanding and walk with God.

What then is the purpose of Jesus’ warning...why is it necessary for him to alert us to these false prophets? Truth is that he knows the hearts of man; he knows the selfish and wicked designs of those false prophets as well as knowing the weaknesses of those that would be included in his flock. Therefore, he gives us warning. The message of the gospel stands on its own and does not need an interpreter or translator. That said, there is one caveat...it takes a heart that is desperate for God to stay in “tune” with His Spirit and wisdom. Even the disciples struggled with this:

And they were all amazed at the majesty of God. But while everyone marveled at all the things which Jesus did, He said to His disciples, "Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is

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about to be betrayed into the hands of men." *But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying.*

Luke 9:43-45

The apostle Paul goes on to write of this "hidden" mystery of God in most of his Church epistles (1Co 2:7, Eph 3:9, Col 1:26). The answer is clear as Jesus has revealed earlier in this chapter; "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks find; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." Once again though, I must remind the reader of the caveat...God looks upon the intent and heart of the man. He also clearly states through the prophet Jeremiah; "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." So, the warning is as valid as it is dire. There are those that will be led astray...not because the gospel is not obvious, but because there are those that are weak and not accustomed to the Shepherd's voice ("*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.*" John 10:27).

I am inclined to follow a course outlined by God and endorsed by Jesus; God proclaimed to the nation of Israel "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*" (Deuteronomy 6:5). Jesus later responded to a question of which was the greatest commandment in similar fashion; "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*" (Matthew 22:37). Putting this teaching...this commandment at the front of my being will ensure that I am seeking God with all of my heart. As such, I will be given knowledge. With the knowledge of God...I am provided the mind of Christ; thus I hear and I know His voice. Accordingly, I am *not* led astray and I am capable of testing and weighing fruit and message comparatively that I may know if the teaching and teacher are of God...or not.

²¹"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

Imagining myself a fly on the wall, I have to wonder who it is that Jesus is speaking to. Considering that these are the closing statements of his sermon on the mount, he must be talking to those that had congregated to hear

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him. However, as the Spirit of God begins to minister truth to my own heart, I understand who he is really speaking to. I see in my mind's eye that Jesus, the living Word of God, is staring directly into my eyes as he proclaims this truth. He says; "Jeff, not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." As I wonder why he is telling me this, I remember what he said to the crowd a moment earlier; *"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."* Still in the process of digesting this truth, my attention and memory is jarred by a prophetic word from Solomon (Prov 11:31) quoted by Peter; *"If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"* (1 Peter 17-18). This somber and sobering admonition strikes the core of who I am. I begin to search and examine my heart...exactly what Jesus wants me to do... Should I live in fear??? Must I look over my shoulder for the remainder of my life??? Is there reason for me to doubt my salvation??? NO. NO. NO. - - - The apostle John writes about this in his first epistle...he writes; *"In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us."* (1 John 4:17-19). Perfect love comes from prioritizing truth. The priority is; "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, your soul, your mind and your strength." Living in this *place*, ensures that we are found complete in Him, and there is no fear, no doubt, no question as to whether I am "meeting the mark". "Not everyone" is me. Jesus speaks to my heart...convicting me to my core that I must live 100% for him; anything less is not satisfactory. Will I still be able to squeeze through the "narrow gate"? Perhaps; but why should I gamble with "squeezing by" when I can walk confidently in a perfectly pure and honestly obedient life wholly consecrated to the One that died to save my soul? I am determined that I will not hear Jesus tell me that He never knew me. I will live honestly and obediently to Him. I will wholly consecrate myself to Him. I will learn to walk in perfect love and never fear. How will I do this? I will deny myself. I will recognize the nature of the flesh...my sinfulness and live at the foot of His cross as I shoulder my own to follow Him. I will learn and I will live...and one day, yes one glorious day, He will tell me; "Well done good and faithful servant. Come and share your master's happiness." (Matthew 25:23).

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²⁴"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." ²⁸When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

Once more Jesus uses the all inclusive pronoun, "everyone". Once again I can only assume that he is speaking directly to me...I do not find any qualifier that presupposes his statement. Jesus simply says "everyone". He tells "me" to put "these" words into practice. I can only (rightfully) assume that he means the words spoken throughout the Sermon on the Mount. Invariably this must include every believer and non-believer as he includes those that "do" put the words into practice and those that "do not". If we consider the implied understanding of that spectrum, we can assume that he also means "everyone" that exists between those "bookends" of everyone that do and everyone that do not. It has been my observation and my experience that we often like to qualify our relationship with Jesus in degrees of graduation. For example; remarks are made by those in the Christian family like these, "I'm a baby Christian" or "God has not called me to that yet" and "I'm a work in progress". While there may be symbolic truth to these statements, they are most often used to excuse disobedience and selfishness where it involves the directives and teaching of Jesus. If we look to Jesus' statements regarding "those" that hear his words, he does not make this same distinction. Truthfully, I would contend that if we are cognizant enough to make the distinction of our walk being at some "level" or degree of maturity to excuse our lack of obedience and/or lack of spiritual growth, it is already clear that God, the Holy Spirit, is speaking to our heart and we should obey His leading. Further, the illustration that Jesus uses to make his point in verses 26 and 27 are painfully evidenced in our churches and world today. As we tend to hold on to vestiges of ourselves and maintain control over various parts of our lives we are forced to choose between the way of Jesus and the way of self. Invariably, when the choice is "self" it cannot be Jesus. When we choose self we undeniably choose not to put all of Jesus' words into practice. Eventually the rains come, and when they do our foundations are shaken. If we have not employed the full counsel of Jesus' teaching, they are sometimes shaken to the point of destruction just as he said they would be. What might the answer be that we do not become a casualty of this proportion? We are to put into practice all these words spoken by Jesus. When the

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Holy Spirit, who is our guide along this path of truth, bears upon our heart a direction that God calls us...we cannot afford the self-indulgent luxury of choosing to excuse ourselves from following Him; to do so invites our destruction... After all rain will come; Jesus said it came down on the wise man and the foolish man alike. What then shall we build our foundation on?

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount spells out to us exactly what he expects of his followers. As I consider the Sermon and the giver of the sermon in their proper context, the true meaning of it and the understanding of who is delivering come into focus. The scriptures tell us that *in Jesus* all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him (Colossians 1:16). This truth carries us back to Genesis. Jesus spoke the world into existence. Jesus breathed the life into His creation. Jesus gave the Law to Israel, and Jesus gave us the spiritual interpretation of His Law. John writes; "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men." These words, whether they be from the Old Testament or from the New, are the words of God, our Creator, our Father, our Teacher, our Savior, and our Friend. How can we not obey them? Why must we struggle with them? The proverbial question for all men is, "What is the meaning to life...what am I here for?" Jesus, the Lord our God, has given us the answer. Do we not dare follow it now? If we do not, who might there be to blame?

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"The Character Traits of a Christian:

A closer look at the Beatitudes of Christ"

An Expository Message from the Sermon on the Mount – By Jeff Borden

Matt. 5:3-12

³Blessed are the poor in spirit,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴Blessed are those who mourn,

for they will be comforted.

⁵Blessed are the meek,

for they will inherit the earth.

⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

for they will be filled.

⁷Blessed are the merciful,

for they will be shown mercy.

⁸Blessed are the pure in heart,

for they will see God.

⁹Blessed are the peacemakers,

for they will be called sons of God.

¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

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Jesus, in his only recorded sermon, The Sermon on the Mount stated a number of blessings that would be recognized in the children of God. I state the “the only recorded sermon” simply because throughout the rest of the gospels Jesus used parables, analogies and metaphors as his primary teaching tools. The blessings, which follow character traits of the believer are as follows:

- Theirs shall be the kingdom of Heaven.
- They shall be comforted.
- They will inherit the earth.
- They shall be filled.
- They will be shown mercy.
- They will see God.
- They will be called sons of God.

These blessings, also known as the Beatitudes, are listed according to what would be conditional character traits. Before we explore these character traits and the blessings afforded them. Lets prepare our minds with some questions we should ask ourselves.

If these blessings listed in the Beatitudes are what follow the believer, am I experiencing these blessings? Do I, or am I experiencing these same blessings that Jesus said “these” would be blessed with? Am I filled? Have I got this satisfaction? Is the fruit of the Spirit being manifested in my life? Am I aware of this dealing of God in my life? Am I experiencing love to God, to other people, joy and peace? Am I manifesting long-suffering, goodness, gentleness, meekness, faith and temperance?

Jesus stated that “those that hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled.” Are we therefore, enjoying the life of God in our souls? Are we aware of the Holy Spirit working within us, forming Christ in us more and more each day? If we claim to be Christian, then we should be able to answer yes to all of these questions. Are we thus filled? Are we enjoying our Christian life and experience?

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Do we know that our sins have been forgiven? Are we rejoicing in that fact and living accordingly, or are we still trying to make ourselves “Christian” trying somehow to attain righteousness in or of ourselves? Am I enjoying peace with God? Do I rejoice in the Lord always?

These are questions that I must ask myself...these are questions that we must ask ourselves if we are not enjoying these things. From the words of Jesus, the only explanation if I am not, is that I am not truly hungering and thirsting for Him and His righteousness. How can I make that deduction? God is not a man that He can lie (**Numbers 23:10**) and Jesus said, “Those that hunger and thirst for righteousness, shall be filled.” That is an absolute statement. There are no other qualifications or conditions.

Having posed these questions, let’s look at this a little more closely. Where does this “hunger” and “thirst” come from? Well, I believe that there is order in these blessings of Christ. Therefore, I suggest that we start with those blessings that precede “those that hunger and thirst.”

Jesus states, “Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.”

Why did Jesus start here? I cannot say for sure, but I have a strong inclination to believe that prior to being filled, a vessel must be emptied of its contents. Jesus stated elsewhere that one does not pour new wine into old wineskins. He also said that a kernel of wheat does not give forth life until it has died and fallen to the ground. What I feel the Master teaching is that we must become destitute in our Spirit...completely free of “self” and all that it believes that “it” can do. We become “aware” of our sin. We must understand that in us, “no good thing dwells” and realize our full and utter dependence on God. The revelation of God’s holiness and God’s grace provides the realization that we are truly “poor in spirit.” **Isaiah 57:15** from the message states, “A Message from the high and towering God, who lives in Eternity, whose name is Holy: “I live in the high and holy places, but also with the low-spirited, the spirit--crushed, And what I do is put new spirit in them, get them up and on their feet again.” We see this also in Isaiah when he caught sight of God, and exclaimed, “Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips.”

Finally we see the perfect example in our Lord, Jesus himself who became a man, taking on the likeness of sinful flesh laying aside His glory to live as a man. He stated that, “I can do nothing of myself, but only the

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will of my Father who sent me.” Jesus tells us, “Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.”

The next blessing Jesus proclaims is “Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.”

This progression of blessings, I believe, build on one another. This is why: One becomes poor in Spirit when they recognize their sin. This realization of wickedness, decay and moral bankruptcy produces mourning. The understanding of our wretchedness and that we, in and of ourselves, are not fit to be in the presence of God; produces this conviction of mourning.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes, “Conviction must by necessity precede conversion, a real sense of sin must come before there can be true joy of salvation.” He goes on to write, “So many people spend all their lives in trying to find this Christian joy. They say they would give the whole world if they could only find it, or could be like some other person who has it. They have failed to see that they must be convicted of sin before they can ever experience joy. They do not like the doctrine of sin. They dislike it intensely and they object to its being preached. They want joy apart from the conviction of sin. But that is impossible; it can never be obtained. Those who are going to be converted and who wish to be truly happy and blessed are those who first of all mourn. Conviction is an essential preliminary to true conversion.”

As the man that becomes aware of his sin confronts himself and ponders his position as it relates to God, he mourns. He mourns that he is in that condition, he mourns that he can do nothing to himself to right that condition. The process of self examination and recognition of the wicked principles of the flesh at work in him (**Romans 7** “...¹⁷*But I need something more! For if I know the law but still can't keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help!* ¹⁸*I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it.* ¹⁹*I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway.* ²⁰*My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time.*”) drives the man to repentance. This repentance is what produces comfort. Turning from our wickedness to God's holiness driven by an awareness of being poor in

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Spirit...mourning....seeking comfort in God’s grace. “Blessed are those that mourn, for they will be comforted.”

Jesus declares in the third beatitude, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”

This statement stands in contrast to everything that the world would have us to believe. The world tells us we must “stand up for ourselves” and we hear of “self-made men”, but here Jesus tells us that the “meek shall inherit the earth.”

Building on those that are “poor in spirit” or understanding our weaknesses and inabilities and confronting our sin before a holy God begins to shed light on the words that Jesus shares with us here. “Blessed are the meek.” What does Jesus mean? Is he portraying one that is easily influenced? Is he describing someone that exhibits niceties and is soft-spoken? I don’t think so. I believe that the meek person that is described here is that person that walks in humility. To be more exact, One that is meek has “died to self.” There is an absence of pride. The man that has “crucified self” does not feel the need to boast or glory in anything he has done or does. He does not feel the need to defend himself from what others may say...there is no self pity for how terribly unfair life is or has been to me. To be sure, meekness is to mean that you have finished with yourself altogether, and you come to see you have no rights...you deserve nothing at all. You come to realize that no harm can come to you; you are dead to self, but alive in Christ. (**Galatians 2:20** *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*)

Finally, it may be understood as this. Leave everything to God – ourselves, our rights, our cause, our future...all in the hands of God. We learn to say as the Apostle Paul said to the church at Philippi (**Philippians 3:7-8** *“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”*) It is at this point that the man has in a sense already inherited the earth, for he is truly satisfied. Nothing can be taken from him for he has already counted it loss. He is content. “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”

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In this, the fourth blessing of the beatitudes, Jesus changes direction. The first three blessings are born of introspection or self examination. This blessing begins to focus on man turning to God. The blessing reads, “Blessed are those that hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

So much can be summed up into this promise of God, yet so much is lost in the utter simplicity of its truth. The whole of man seeks to find satisfaction...happiness...bliss...joy. In this first half of these beatitudes Jesus has given the outline for the formula to succeed in that quest. It goes like this:

- (1) **Man recognizes his sinful state** – *“blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*
- (2) **Man repents of his sin** – *“blessed are those that mourn for they shall be comforted.”*
- (3) **Man submits his will and seeks the will of God** – *“blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”*
- (4) **Man loves God with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his mind** – *“blessed are those that hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled.”*

Unfortunately, the perfection of God’s plan and the Words of Christ are lost in the distorted perceptions and understandings of man. Man hungers for happiness...man hungers for joy, and man does not find it. Man makes excuses and allows the thorns of life to steal the seed of God, but Jesus states that “those that hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled.” Those that hunger as if they are starved with all their soul and all their heart for the righteousness of God will find it. They will be filled. Does my daily life consume my energy or is my daily life fueled by my desire for God. That is the question that we must continually ask ourselves. As we seek God and as we endeavor to grow closer to Him it is critical that we continue to seek the continuous filling of God’s Holy Spirit. God’s Holy Spirit is the power with which we are overcomers in this physical world. There is no way that man, on his own can overcome the world or achieve righteousness. God and God alone provides righteousness and that is done by the work of and through Jesus Christ.

So then, what does this pursuit of righteous mean? It means an all consuming desire and quest to become like Jesus. (1 Peter 1:16 *“Be holy, as I am holy”*) Why is this important? All who lack the righteousness of God remain under the wrath of God and are facing death. Anybody who dies in this world

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without being clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ is cast out. Remember the revelation of Isaiah (**Isaiah 6:1-7**), seeing the things we are guilty of so often in the sight of God, and in the sight of utter holiness, we would hate them even as He does. That is the greatest reason for hungering and thirsting for righteousness – to obtain the mind of Christ and see sin as the despicable blight that it is. For in God, there is no darkness and as we progress toward Him and embrace His nature we will refuse to defend our sin and come to despise it as much as God does.

To end on a somewhat positive note, if we see these things with the heart of God, we will desire no less. We will desire to know Him and the power of his resurrection (**Philippians 3:10**). We will ask, and it shall be given. We shall knock, and it will be opened to us (**Matt 7:7-8**). “We will hunger and thirst for righteousness, and we will be filled.”

I close today with the same questions that I opened with... If these blessings listed in the Beatitudes are what follow the believer, am I experiencing these blessings? Do I, or am I experiencing these same blessings that Jesus said “these” would be blessed with? Am I filled? Have I got this satisfaction? Is the fruit of the Spirit being manifested in my life? Am I aware of this dealing of God in my life? Am I experiencing love to God, to other people, joy and peace? Am I manifesting long-suffering, goodness, gentleness, meekness, faith and temperance?

Jesus stated that “those that hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled.” Are we therefore, enjoying the life of God in our souls? Are we aware of the Holy Spirit working within us, forming Christ in us more and more each day? If we claim to be Christian, then we should be able to answer yes to all of these questions. Are we thus filled? Are we enjoying our Christian life and experience?

Do we know that our sins have been forgiven? Are we rejoicing in that fact and living accordingly, or are we still trying to make ourselves “Christian” trying somehow to attain righteousness in or of ourselves? Am I enjoying peace with God? Do I rejoice in the Lord always? If you answer no to any of those questions, I urge you to consider your relationship with God. Don’t put off for another minute what God is calling you to today. Ask, you shall receive...Hunger and thirst, you will be filled.

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Part II

An Expository Message from the Sermon on the Mount – By Jeff Borden

Matt. 5:3-12

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We last discussed the first half of these beatitudes and as I spoke with you, I suggested that our Lord had reason for speaking them in the order in which He did. As we have already looked at these first four blessings let us take a moment to recap before moving on:

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

“I am poor in spirit; I realize that I have no righteousness; I realize that face-to-face with God and His righteousness I am utterly helpless; I can do nothing. Not only that, I mourn because of the sin that is within me; I have come to see, as the result of the operation of the Holy Spirit, the blackness of my own heart. I know what it is to cry out, ‘O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?’ and desire to be rid of this vileness that is within me. Not only that, I am meek, which means that now that I have experienced this true view of myself, nobody else can hurt me, nobody else can insult me, nobody can ever say anything too bad about me. I have seen myself, and my greatest enemy does not know the worst about me. I have seen myself as something truly hateful, and it is because of this that I have hungered and thirsted after righteousness. I have longed for it. I have seen that I cannot create or produce it, and that nobody else can either. I have seen my desperate position in the sight of God I have hungered and thirsted for that righteousness which will put me right with God, which will reconcile me to God, and give me a new nature and life. And I have seen it in Christ. I have been filled; I have received it all as a free gift...”

Following this insight to self and motivated to hunger and thirst for God, Jesus says we will be filled. I say that it is only logical then to see my attitude towards others change, and radically so. Jesus states in this blessing, **“Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.”** If these preceding statements are true, then I can see man the way I saw him previously. I see them as slaves to sin; oppressed and lied to by the one that would deceive us in effort to damn our souls. I now look upon man without dislike or criticism, but rather look upon him with pity. I understand that he is where I, but for the grace of God, would be. I separate the sin from the sinner now. I treat him now with mercy. I pray for his salvation. I extend a hand to him in

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encouragement...my desire is to relieve his suffering. That essentially is the definition of merciful; it is pity plus action. So then, I have a feeling of pity for my fellow man; and my concern about his state, and his misery leads to an anxiety to relieve it. I am merciful. I have been shown mercy, therefore I extend mercy.

In the **18th chapter of Matthew**, Jesus speaks a parable of forgiveness. He tells of an account of a king who was owed a large sum of money by a man. The man begged forgiveness and the king forgave all the debt that was owed...That same man being owed himself the repayment of a debt that was but a pittance of the amount he owed; had the debtor owing him thrown into jail. He showed no forgiveness. No mercy. The king who had forgiven the debt found out about this act or lack of forgiveness and, in turn, rescinded his act of kindness. The man was jailed and turned over to be tortured until his debt was paid. Jesus states, regarding this action, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." What makes me merciful is the grace of God. So then, if I am not merciful, it only stands to reason; I have never understood the grace and the mercy of God. Therefore, I am outside Christ; I am yet in my sins, and the same as the unmerciful, unforgiving man in the parable of Jesus, I too am unforgiven. "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

This next blessing of our Lord is truly something to behold. In this blessing, Jesus states, "**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**" Wow! This is the goal though, right? But what does Jesus mean by "pure in heart?" First, we should come to an understanding of the meaning of "heart" and how it is scripturally defined or portrayed. Scripture includes all of the components of man when it references the heart. It includes the emotions, intellect and the will or desire of man. It defines the heart as essentially the center of man's being and personality. It is the total man. That is the emphasis of our Lord when he states, "Blessed are the pure in heart." However, there is an antithesis or opposite of this statement...look at **Mark 7:21**, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders..." Why do I throw that scripture in here? So we can see the contrast. You see there are actually a couple of components to this purity of heart. The first would be single-mindedness. That is to be all consumed; mind, body and soul for a single purpose. I want to live like and for Jesus. The second component is motive. Why do I want to do this? Do I want to do this for my own benefit? If so, I have entirely missed the message. I should desire to live in this single-minded state for the glory of God. This should be the supreme desire of my/our life. It means that we desire God; that we desire to know Him, which we desire to love Him and to serve

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Him. And Jesus states in this blessing that only those who are like that will see God...pretty sobering. Let us make it a little more so. Consider this: What is it that Jesus is saying must be necessary before I can see God? Holiness. It is a pure heart, an unmixed condition of my being. Holiness is a driven, all-consuming desire to live for and be like Him. Do not be confused though, it is not just a matter of decency, morality or an intellectual understanding of the Christian doctrines. It is nothing less than the whole person involved. **(1 John 1:5)** "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." In the spiritual realm, there is no mix of light and darkness, black and white...God and sin. There is no connection between them. That is why we are commanded by God, "be holy, as I am holy." Only those who are like Him can see God and be in His presence. That is why we must be pure in heart before we can see God. I say again...do not get this confused with a spiritual list of "do-good" things. This "purity of heart" is not about a Pharisaical lifestyle of "white-washed" outsides. It is the sincere inward desire to be like Him that sets forth action on the outside to be like Him.

Here is a thought before moving on...Those that are pure in heart are going to see God! Do you agree that this is the greatest, most earth-shattering, mind-boggling news that you have ever heard? Is this your greatest desire and ambition? To see God...? If this is true of you, and you believe the gospel, then you must agree with the beloved John, **(1 John 3:3)** "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure." Are you preparing yourself for the audience with the King? Do you look forward to it? Are you wasting time on things that are of no value to you on that great day? We are now, bound by time...however there will come a day when we will be with Him and worship Him in all His glory, eternally. Until then, our confidence can be that He is working in us to prepare us for that day. But we also, as John wrote, should work to purify ourselves even as he is pure. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

This brings us to this next beatitude, where our Lord states, **"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of god."** But, what is a peacemaker? Perhaps the better way to answer that question or understand the definition would be to gain understanding of what it is not. A peacemaker is not one that avoids conflict. The mindset, "peace at any price" usually involves a great deal of compromise, which when found to involve the holiness of God, is not an option. Therefore, compromise or peace at all cost cannot be included in the definition of peacemaker. The avoidance of conflict or confrontation does not satisfy or solve the problem or generate peace. It may postpone confrontation or conflict, but it does nothing for lasting peace. The problems still exist.

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So, what is a peacemaker? I will answer with another negative. He is not an argumentative person. By definition, a peacemaker cannot be quarrelsome. In a positive state, a peacemaker is active. The name itself demands action. Therefore, a peacemaker is one who actively seeks peace.

How does a peacemaker seek peace? The first way he does this is by being unbiased. In other words, he does not look at his best interest. Self has been removed as a variable. The first thing, therefore, we must say about the peacemaker is that he has an entirely new view of himself, a new view which really amounts to this. (Remember, we are building on these characteristics) He has seen himself and has come to see that in a sense this miserable self is so wretched; it has no rights or privileges; it does not deserve anything. You have seen yourself as “poor in spirit.” You have mourned because of your sinful nature. You have truly seen yourself and you “hunger and thirst for righteousness.” You no longer stand for your rights and privileges, you no longer ask “what about me in this?” You have forgotten self. Perhaps one of the best tests of whether we are truly Christian or not is just this: Do I hate my natural self? Jesus said, (**John 12:25**) “he that loves his life (in this world) shall lose it.” By this, he meant loving ourselves, the natural man, and the natural life. That is one of the best tests of whether we are Christian or not. Have you come to hate yourself, your natural self: Can you say with Paul, (**Romans 7:24**) “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” If you have not, or if you cannot, you cannot be a peacemaker. You see, the Christian man is a man who has two men in him, the old and the new. He hates the old and takes it captive...telling it, “I’m done with you.”

The peacemaker has a new view of the world. The peacemaker is the man who does not talk about people when they are offensive and difficult. He does not ask, “Why are they like that?” He understands that they are like that because they are still being governed by the god of this world...the spirit that works in the children of disobedience. The poor person is a victim of self and of Satan. In that light, the peacemaker has pity and mercy upon him. At that moment, he is capable of helping that person and is likely to make peace with him. Continuing that thought, it also means an entirely new view of the world. The peacemaker has only one concern, and it is the glory of God amongst men. That was the Lord Jesus' only concern. His one interest in life was not Himself, but the glory of God. Moreover, the peacemaker is the man whose central concern is the glory of God. He spends his life in trying to minister to that glory. He knows that God make man perfect, and that the world was meant to be Paradise, so when he sees disputes and quarrelling, he sees something that is detracting from the glory of God. This is the thing that concerns him, nothing else. Lastly, and in a practical sense, as

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peacemakers, we should endeavor to diffuse peace wherever we are. This is done by being selfless, by showing love, and by being approachable. If we do not think of self at all, people will feel that we are approachable. They will know that they will get sympathy and understanding. They will know that they will get an unbiased outlook. In that, the peacemaker will be able to minister the gospel of Christ and the captives will be set free receiving peace. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God.”

We close with these final blessings of our Lord from these beatitudes. Jesus states, **“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”** **”Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”**

Throughout the New Testament, we are told and even given examples of persecution of the followers of Christ. However, before expounding on this blessing let us look at what is being persecuted. Let us do that by looking at what is not meant as it pertains to persecution.

It does not say, “Blessed are those who are having a hard time in their Christian life because they are being difficult.” It does not say, “Blessed are those that are being persecuted as Christians because they are lacking in wisdom and lacking in wisdom in what they regard as their testimony.” There is no need to really belabor this point, but so often, we meet people, Christian people, who are suffering mild persecution entirely because of their own design...because of something either in themselves or in what they are doing. However, the promise does not apply here. The promise states, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness.” We can and so often do bring endless suffering upon ourselves; we can create difficult situations, which are unnecessary, most often because of self-righteousness. We are often long in understanding the differences between prejudice and principle and slow to realize the difference between being offensive, in a natural sense, because of our particular makeup and temperament, and causing offence because we are righteous. Going one-step further, the beatitude does not state, “Blessed are those that are persecuted for being good, or noble, or self-sacrificing. No, it states, “Blessed are those that are persecuted for righteousness.”

This beatitude tests our ideas as to what a Christian is. The Christian is like his Lord. Jesus said, (**Luke 6:26**) “Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets.” But isn’t that what we would believe a good Christian to be? Someone that gets along with everyone is nice and

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people speak highly of? That is not what Jesus says. He states that the real Christian is a man who is not praised by everybody. They did not praise Jesus, and they (the world) will not praise his followers.

To be a Christian, ultimately, is to be like Christ; and one can never be like Christ without being entirely changed. We must get rid of the old nature that hates Christ and hates righteousness; we need a new nature that will love these things and love Him and thus become like Him. If you try to imitate Christ the world will praise you; if you become Christ-like it will hate you.

Finally, we are to rejoice in the face of these persecutions and trials. Why? How? Rather than lean to negatives or “why nots” I will leave you with this thought:

We are identified with Christ. That is why we are persecuted for righteousness sake. It is like Christ that we have been associated with. Heaven awaits those that are faithful. Unmixed joy, and glory and holiness....purity and wonder! That's what awaits the child of God. If you are in Christ, that is what awaits you. How absolutely crazy it is to not spend our time thinking about that, or for the trivialness of the blink of an eye that this life is that we lose sight of that. Paul told the Colossians to set their sites on things above. We cannot afford to cling to this unhappy wretched world and fail to think on these things and to meditate upon them. So, if people are unkind, cruel, and spiteful, and if we are being persecuted, well then we must say to ourselves, Ah-Ha! Unhappy people; they are doing this because they do not know Him, and they do not understand me....They are indirectly proving to me that I belong to Him. This fuels my joy. Does it fuel yours?

(2 Corinthians 13:5) Challenge to examine ourselves in the Faith.