

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 13, Chapter 5 Continued

The richness and depth of instruction contained in the Sermon on the Mount is so breathtaking and yet foundational to the life of a Believer in the Father and in Messiah Yeshua, that after much time studying and researching it, I am still am at a loss to explain why the other 3 Gospel accounts don't include it. This is not to indict those Gospels or to declare them as inferior to the Book of Matthew; however none of Christ's other addresses come close to the Sermon on the Mount in providing the underpinnings and the expanded principles of our faith. To my mind, the only wide-ranging message from God in all the Bible, Old Testament or New, that can equal it is Moses standing on Mt. Sinai and teaching the Israelites the laws and commands that God gave to him. It is no wonder that Matthew draws us a picture of Jesus as the 2nd Moses; the future "prophet like me" that Moses promised to the tribes of Israel.

I should review our lesson from last week for a few minutes, beginning with my statement that no other Gospel contains the Sermon on the Mount. Many Bible scholars disagree with me on that matter and point to Luke Chapter 6, which even they label as "The Sermon the Plain" because Luke has this sermon taking place on a large flat area, a plain, somewhere that is unspecified; but it does refer to the "hill country". Even so, it says that Yeshua came **down** from a hill to a plain and began talking to the people there. While there are many similarities there are also at least as many differences between Luke's Sermon on the Plain and Matthew's Sermon the Mount. I am convinced that these are two different sermons, spoken by Yeshua at different times and locations, even though some of the subject matter is the same.

My conjecture as to why Matthew chose to explore Yeshua's Sermon on the

Mount so extensively, while the other Gospel accounts skip it, has to do with Matthew's educated and pious Jewish background, along with who he anticipated would be his readers; it would be mostly Jews..... Believers, or others that we today might label as Seekers. What about being a religious Jew would make Matthew more interested? It is because the entire Sermon on the Mount is essentially an in-depth teaching on the Torah as given to Moses. The teaching was so astounding, and Yeshua's authority was so evident that, as we will soon encounter, Christ had to pause and make it clear to His listeners that in no way was His intent to abolish, change, add to or subtract from the God-given Torah. Nor was it to create a new one: a Torah of Jesus.

One of the important matters that I brought up last week was that Yeshua chose His disciples; they didn't choose Him. The context here is all important because this is one of the passages used to defend various views concerning what Theologians call the Doctrine of Election. We'll not take a long detour here to discuss this matter, but in the past 3 or 4 centuries, John Calvin's thoughts on this matter have become quite influential in many large branches of the Church, especially the more theologically conservative ones. In a nutshell, he brings together the ideas of divine election and predestination to mean that God decides before we're ever born which individuals will believe and be saved versus those who won't. So our free will plays little to no role in the matter of salvation. I do not subscribe to this notion. I think Calvin did, and others do, because they are taking this matter of Christ choosing His disciples a bit too far and out of its historical context.

In Yeshua's era various kinds of Jewish Holy Men and revered teachers had followings. The followers of these various leaders were called in Hebrew *talmidim*. The more followers one of these religious leaders could cobble together, the more clout and veneration within the Jewish community he had. So there was, quite literally, competition among these leaders to acquire followers..... disciples. As David Stern points out, many of the standard English words used in our Bibles to translate broad Hebrew concepts don't fully capture the meaning. The Hebrew term *talmid* (singular to the plural word *talmidim*) translated to the English term "disciple" is such a word. In our day a disciple of a certain master..... whether it is from a religious aspect, or a secular aspect, even as it pertains to sports.... most often means that these followers have adopted a significant amount of the fundamental principles a particular master in a field of endeavor teaches. Although usually they feel free to also adopt other ideas from other masters, or even at some point switch to a different master altogether.

These ideas are usually compartmentalized such that the disciple only applies what their master taught them to a certain area of their life. But for a *talmid* in Yeshua's era the relationship between disciple and master was far deeper and fully encompassing their entire life. There was a level of undying trust involved in which the goal of the disciple was to become as close to a clone of his master as is humanly possible; in manner, in ethics, and in lifestyle.

Thus these potential disciples would make a conscious, considered decision about becoming a disciple of a certain master because it would be a life changing moment for them, which would guide the remainder of their days on earth. However we find that Yeshua didn't compete with other masters for His disciples; He simply commanded them to follow Him. This was rare, if not unheard of. But neither were the 12 men that Yeshua commanded to join Him characterized as mindless robots who had no choice in the matter. That is, that in this instance their free wills went dormant or were overridden as though they were put in a trance. They heard Yeshua's command to them, but any and all could have said no. Further, those who became the disciples of various masters in the 1st century were searching for such an opportunity and tended to organize their lives accordingly to take advantage. Paul is a good example of this. He was a Diaspora Jew who came from a well to do family. He was educated, especially sharp, and had adopted the religious doctrines of the Pharisees; but he wanted more. So he chose to go to the Academy of Gamaliel in Jerusalem, probably so that one day he might have the credentials to attract his own flock of followers. Sometime later, on the road to Damascus, he was introduced to another and greater master, Yeshua, who spoke to Paul from Heaven and told Him to be His disciple. Paul was certainly not seeking to be a disciple of another, and especially not of Yeshua. Nonetheless, he switched loyalties.

Thus when we add in the historical Jewish backdrop, we see the uniqueness of Yeshua choosing His disciples from among those not seeking a master (or at least not a new one), as opposed to disciples choosing from a variety of potential masters who were seeking to add to their flocks. So in my opinion to form a spiritual law (a Church doctrine) from this event on the Sea of Galilee, when Yeshua commanded 4 fishermen to follow Him, is not warranted. Especially a doctrine that says that only certain people from among all humanity have been divinely pre-selected from eternity past to participate in God's Kingdom (and of this the included and the excluded individuals have no choice in the matter). This is misguided, in scriptural error, and even makes the activity of Believers going out to spread the Good News for Our Messiah rather pointless.

The opening few sentences of Christ's Sermon on the Mount are sort of bundled together and given a special title called The Beatitudes. Depending on who you believe, and what the chosen criteria is to qualify as a Beatitude, there are from 8 to 10 of these sayings of Yeshua. We covered the first 4 in the previous lesson. Rather than review each of them I only want to point out that I showed you how each could (and probably should) be understood by means of incorporating the ancient Jewish interpretation concepts of **P'shat** and **Remez**. **P'shat** means the simple, plain sense of a Bible passage; **Remez** means that while we must take the passage literally, there is also a hint towards something deeper and more far reaching. I contend that this is exactly how our Jewish Matthew intended us to approach especially these first 8 recorded sayings.

Part of what divides Christianity, especially with a modern view towards the foretold End Times, is that most Bible academics and teachers want us to choose between the simple, plain sense of the Beatitudes (and many other Bible passages) and the deeper sense of it (where appropriate). That is, that the one way is correct and the other is incorrect. That is not necessary when we see the wisdom behind the interpretation concepts of **P'shat** and **Remez** that the learned Jews used to plumb the depths of the Holy Scriptures. Both can be equally correct, even if they apply to different times and circumstances in history.

The 5th Beatitude is located in Matthew 5:7. Turn your Bibles to that passage.

CJB Matthew 5:7 ***"How blessed are those who show mercy! for they will be shown mercy.***

The idea that mercy is a reciprocal matter between God and man was not new nor exclusive to Yeshua's teaching. There are a number of biblical passages that express this concept that when we show mercy or pity or compassion upon our fellow man, it is God who will reward us. Proverbs comes to mind.

CJB Proverbs 14:21 ***He who despises his fellow, sins; but he who shows compassion to the humble is happy.***

In this passage that says the one who shows compassion to his fellow man is 'happy', the Hebrew word translated most often as "happy" is **esher**. Another meaning for this word is "blessed". Like the concept of **shalom**, being blessed is a gift from God. In the Babylonian Talmud tractate Sabbath 151b is found: "Whoever has pity on people will obtain pity from Heaven." Same concept. The

point is that having mercy upon our fellow man is directly related to the 2nd of what was understood to have been the 2 greatest commandments of God: to love God whole-heartedly, and to love our fellow man as we love ourselves. Therefore to NOT show mercy (or pity or compassion..... different words for essentially the same thing) is to break that greatest commandment.

Matthew brings up the issue of mercy many times in his Gospel and has Yeshua directly dealing with it several times. It was one of the most fundamental principles of life among the Jews and the earlier Hebrews. In 2 later chapters Matthew quotes Hosea 6 on this matter of mercy.

CJB Hosea 6:6 *For what I desire is mercy, not sacrifices, knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*

Christ deals with mercy in Matthew 23 (among other places):

CJB Matthew 23:23 *"Woe to you hypocritical Torah-teachers and P'rushim! You pay your tithes of mint, dill and cumin; but you have neglected the weightier matters of the Torah- justice, mercy, trust. These are the things you should have attended to- without neglecting the others!"*

This is a virtually identical thought to Hosea 6:6. What we ought to notice is that Yeshua calls mercy one of the weightier matters of the Law. That is, while all the laws of the Torah are to be obeyed, there exists a hierarchy whereby some laws carry more weight in God's eyes, thereby leading to larger consequences for our actions in regard to our fastidious obedience (or disobedience) towards them. In the **P'shat** interpretation sense, God wants our actions during our lives to reflect obedience to His laws and commands. In fact He reminds folks that paying tithes and making offerings at the Temple is a good and required thing; but when we neglect the more loving and fundamental obligations to our fellow man, such as mercy, it represents a more serious offense against God than not paying our tithes (for instance). In the **Remez** interpretation sense, the consequences for these weightier matters will occur at the Final Judgment. At that time the measure of our mercy towards our neighbor is rewarded with the measure of God's mercy towards us; and our lack of mercy is rewarded with His lack of mercy towards us.

While Christianity sometimes makes small of this God-principle or even says it no longer applies for Believers the truth is that, Old or New Testaments, God is the

king and Creator of quid pro quo. One of the more famous statements in the Torah of how God operates His justice system is called Lex Talionis: an eye for an eye. It is a statement of the principle of proportional justice. For God worshippers it means that the level of our faithfulness towards His laws and commands when we are alive on this earth will have a commensurate effect on our lives when we are living in the eternal realm. Even more, there are some commands and laws that carry greater weight (are more important to Him) than others, and how He judges us and places us in the hierarchy of His Kingdom of Heaven will also take into account WHICH of His laws and commands we put more weight on (a note to the wise: it is best to agree with God and put the most weight on the laws that He does). Yeshua says that these 3 matters carry the most weight: justice, mercy, and trust. I could speak on this for quite some time, but I'll fight that urge and instead just sum it up. In each of these 3 matters of justice, mercy and trust, it is God's definition of them, applied in God's context that we are to take them. Instead too often we try to apply our personal sense of justice, mercy and trust to a situation; but that can miss the mark entirely and so offend God.

God's justice is such an immense topic. The part that matters the most is that our offenses against Him must be atoned for, and that can only be done with the sacrificial death of an innocent creature. That principle is the bedrock of the Levitical sacrificial system. Thus in order to atone for our sins in the highest possible way that includes all types, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to be that innocent creature. Further His death was a once and for all sacrifice to atone for us. But God's justice is far more extensive than that. It is part of a system of Law and it explains what is a crime (a sin) to God and what is not, and how these levels of offenses are to be dealt with. It ranges from petty theft to murder, which brings upon the perpetrator a minor slap on the wrist, all the way up to execution.

Mercy is complicated. For one thing, the English word mercy is an attempted translation of the Hebrew word and concept of **chesed**. When this word appears in the Old Testament we'll see a variation of translations for it; loving-kindness, mercy, benevolence, and grace to name a few. In the Greek New Testament the translator will already have chosen a word that (like English) communicates only a part of what the concept is that God is communicating to us. So in reality, in Matthew 23:23 where we'll find the word "mercy" (in most translations) as 1 of the 3 weightier matters, in fact the weightier matter is **chesed**: loving-kindness, mercy, compassion, pity, benevolence and grace all rolled into one.

And as for the weightier matter of trust, it is a similar issue. Only this time the issue is not displaying trust between ourselves and our fellow man. Rather it is about living our lives in wholehearted trust of God and His Word. In Greek the word that is translated as trust is *pistis*. And while trust is not a wrong translation, I think a better word to more effectively convey its meaning to our modern way of thinking is faithfulness. Our faithfulness towards God involves more than belief, even more than trust; it also involves an uncompromising loyalty. So each of these 3 weightier matters is larger in its scope than it might appear to us in our English Bibles.

The 6th Beatitude is Matthew 5:8:

CJB Matthew 5:8 *"How blessed are the pure in heart! for they will see God."*

This or something similar does not occur in Luke's Sermon on the Plain. And again, with this saying Jesus is not introducing a new or shocking concept to the Jews. We find virtually the same thing in the Psalms. Turn your Bibles to Psalm 24 and we're going to read this short Psalm in its entirety to help us better understand what Christ is the telling the crowd up on the hill in the Galilee.

READ PSALM 24 all

So a person with a pure heart is one who has good character. It is one whose character has been molded and shaped by God. But what exactly, does pure "heart" mean? In modern times the use of the word "heart" is meant metaphorically as a place where love resides (or if one has a wicked heart, where hate resides). It is a concept that is also steeped in emotion; it reflects how it is that we feel about ourselves or someone else. None of this is bad or wrong, but it also is not the biblical concept of the word "heart".

Biblically the heart is more or less what we now know the brain to be. That is, biblically when the word "heart" is used, it refers to that place in the human body where the mind and the intellect reside. In Yeshua's era and for some few more hundreds of years, the seat of our various emotions was not thought to be our heart but rather they were divided up into several of our organs depending on the nature of the emotion. Never was the heart where the emotion of warm feelings towards others, or God, lived. The heart was thought to be the place of rational thought; the place where we perceived the world around us. Today, even though we know that no emotions or thinking whatsoever occur in the heart organ, the

term "heart" has become a metaphor for a place of warm, loving feelings.

So if we were forced to choose only one English word to use instead of heart to understand what God's Word was getting at when that word was used, the word would be "mind". To use modern definitions, this 6th Beatitude would be phrased: "How blessed are the pure of **mind** for they will see God". The validation of this meaning that I propose comes to life starting with Matthew 5:21.

So what does the word "pure" mean in the biblical sense as it relates to the condition of our mind? We must first recall the purity rules of the Torah. Ritual purity is maintained by not contacting something that is impure. However should the inevitable happen, a wash and a wait cures it. That is, if a person has become ritually impure (and all will) one must be immersed in living water and then depending on the nature and cause of the impurity, must wait for a specified amount of time to pass. Obviously our minds cannot be immersed in water; for one reason a mind is an intangible thing. What we think and what we believe is invisible except for the behaviors that result from it. Therefore while the most pious Jews (including Jesus) would immerse on a regular basis for all sorts of ritual purity reasons, it was regularly done in a fastidious adherence to a Torah law regarding ritual purity and too often performed merely as a mechanical custom.

The true worshipper of God, however, understands that the outward display and ritual washing are only effective if there is a real and sincere inward thought of what God is wanting achieved. The goal is a quiet private encounter with God; not to make an impression upon the religious authorities and witnesses in order to satisfy their rules or customs.

Matthew 5:9 expresses that the reward for having a pure mind is to see God. Seeing God, on the surface and in the **P'shat** interpretation sense, in that day meant to know God intimately in the here and now. It meant to know His ways and to have a profound loyalty to Him that has resulted in a personal relationship with Him. To "see God" is, therefore, a Jewish expression since the principle from Exodus chapter 33 is that no one may **see** God and live. Viewing with our eyes the person and substance of Yehoveh is not the mental picture being drawn by this Jewish expression. Yet in the **Remez** interpretation sense, this is not so much referring to the present life but rather to the eternal life when, in fact, seeing God is meant more literally. Having a relationship with Him will in the eternal realm move us from seeing God in the ethereal and invisible sense, to seeing

Him in the tangible and visible sense. This happens because if a person is of pure mind, then he will accept God's justice (His salvation in Messiah). And if one is saved, then he has joined God's Kingdom. And if one has joined God's Kingdom then he shall, in the eternal future, dwell with God in the same way Adam and Eve originally did, on earth, in the Garden of Eden, where they saw God face to face.

The 7th Beatitude is found in Matthew 5:9.

CJB Matthew 5:9 *"How blessed are those who make peace! for they will be called sons of God."*

Because Seed of Abraham Torah Class presents the Bible from a Hebraic heritage worldview, I imagine that many who are following this lesson rather automatically assume by the mention of "peace" in this Beatitude that this saying from Christ is meant to invoke among this huge crowd of Jews before Him, the Hebrew concept of **shalom**. I don't think it is. For one glaring reason, God alone is the maker and giver of **shalom**, while in this passage the reference is to certain human beings who are the makers of peace. **Shalom** is a spiritual concept about divinely given well being in all of its facets; health, inner peace, joy, prosperity, nearness to God, restoration, welcome, and more. It is not something that can be produced within a human; it must be implanted in us in a divine act of God's will. Therefore this Beatitude can only be about peace in the more conventional sense that is familiar to most people in the world. That is, peace meaning an absence of conflict or strife; internal or external.

If we back away from this passage and look at God's Word overall, every mention of peace in the Bible certainly doesn't mean the gift of divine well-being. A good example is from the mouth of Christ Himself; it is found in Matthew 10:34. There we read::

CJB Matthew 10:34 *"Don't suppose that I have come to bring peace to the Land. It is not peace I have come to bring, but a sword!"*

Another and more familiar translation of this same passage is the KJV:

KJV Matthew 10:34 *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*

Although there are numerous other passages I could have chosen to help explain the meaning of "peace" in this Beatitude, I like this one because I see a play on words occurring that gives us both ends of the spectrum of the biblical meaning of "peace".

Whether the proper interpretation of this verse is of Christ saying that he is NOT bringing peace on the earth or He is NOT bringing peace to the Land (specifically the Holy Land), doesn't matter concerning the issue at hand, because the type of peace that the divine Yeshua always brings is Heavenly peace: **shalom**. God-produced well-being for humans. And, says Jesus, He is **not** bringing that. Rather it is that His actions and His words will **not** bring about well-being but will actually be the catalyst for human conflict. He says that He is bringing a sword. A sword is a military weapon for the purpose of fighting a conflict.

So let's take that understanding back to our passage in Matthew 5:9. The peacemakers are not, and cannot be, the shalom-makers. Rather the peacemakers are the ones who try to prevent, or bring an end, to human conflict; whether that conflict is between individuals or between nations. As with the other Beatitudes, Yeshua is not announcing a new idea or plan. Rather He is merely saying what is already in the Torah, and was also part of religious Jewish culture at that time. In Pirkei Avot 1:12 (Pirkei Avot is a compilation of sayings of the great Sages and Rabbis concerning ethical principles) we read this: **"Hillel said, 'Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace, and pursuing peace, loving mankind, and bringing them near to the Torah'".** So the fundamental importance of teaching peace (lack of conflict) was an established principle and virtue among the Jewish religious leadership and therefore among Jewish society.

So what, then, was Christ getting at when He said those words? Bible scholars can't agree on it. I think we must look to the historical context for an answer. During the early 1st century the Jews were an occupied nation. Some Jews were content to live with this unpleasant reality, while others were vehemently opposed. Because of the Roman occupation most Jews thought they were living in the End Times, and the Prophets speak of those times as turbulent and full of wars and conflicts. Many Jews wanted to resist the Romans but not so far as to bring about retribution or war. Some, the Zealots, wanted an outright war of rebellion. The Prophets who foretold of the Roman occupation said it was God using a foreign power to punish Israel for their unfaithfulness to Him. Therefore we'll find Yeshua urging the people not to rise up against Rome but rather finding

a way to live with it, peacefully, because the occupation was His Father's doing. No doubt among the diverse thousands at His Sermon on the Mount there would have been folks who adopted every view and hope concerning the Roman occupation of the Holy Land. There would have been Zealots and active occupation resisters listening, as well as those who had sympathy with them or even were considering joining them; such was the times. Yeshua was probably speaking to them.

As for the matter of these who remained non-violent (peacemakers) being called "sons of God" for their efforts, the reality is that the kings of Israel were called sons of God as were angels. So being a son of God was, biblically, applied in more than one situation. Paul also addresses this term in the Book of Romans.

CJB Romans 8:14 ¹⁴ *All who are led by God's Spirit are God's sons.*

I'll borrow from my own lesson in Romans on this subject. A Believer is imputed to be God's son because anyone led by God's Spirit is a son to Him. This is a Jewish expression that reflects a universally understood Jewish cultural concept of the value of a son over a servant. Although several Bible characters will be called servants of God (a high status), those called sons of God are even higher. Thus while priests were called servants of God (a high status), Israel's kings were called sons of God (a higher status). Prophets were called servants of God; but Yeshua is called the Son of God. Thus the typical Levitical priests, although indeed properly serving God, do not necessarily have God's spirit in them so they can only be called servants. But every Believer in Christ is elevated in status above Levitical priests because we have God's spirit (the Holy Spirit) living in us, so we are sons of God. And ladies, don't let this bother you. The issue is not one of gender (son versus daughter). The issue is our status before the Lord. From the status standpoint women gain the same status of "sons of God" just as do males if you trust Yeshua as your Lord, King, and Savior.

Bottom line to Beatitude number 7: being a non-violent peacemaker is an expected part of the character of a disciple of Christ. So from the ***P'shat*** interpretation sense, then this Beatitude is Messiah saying that following Him means saying no to resisting Rome and especially to fomenting trouble. Rather peace with the occupying Romans, as much as was within their control, was the Godly choice. This would have greatly disappointed many of the Zealots in the crowd and convinced most Jews that Yeshua could NOT have been the Messiah because the traditional belief was that God's Messiah would

be a great warrior king (like David) who would appear and lead Israel to defeat the Romans, and also to begin a new golden age of Israel's dominance in the region, if not over the entire known world. The Jews doing what Christ is commanding, then, will make them sons of God and great in God's eyes; but not necessarily so in the eyes of other Jews.

But from the **Remez** interpretation sense, being sons of God in the present will propel us to being sons of God in a greater (the ultimate) sense in the eternal future. One such scriptural example to explain and support this is found in Revelation 21.

CJB Revelation 21:1 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had passed away, and the sea was no longer there. ² Also I saw the holy city, New Yerushalayim, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ I heard a loud voice from the throne say, "See! God's Sh'khinah is with mankind, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and he himself, God-with-them, will be their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will no longer be any death; and there will no longer be any mourning, crying or pain; because the old order has passed away." ⁵ Then the One sitting on the throne said, "Look! I am making everything new!" Also he said, "Write, 'These words are true and trustworthy!'" ⁶ And he said to me, "It is done! I am the 'A' and the 'Z,' the Beginning and the End. To anyone who is thirsty I myself will give water free of charge from the Fountain of Life. ⁷ He who wins the victory will receive these things, and I will be his God, and he will be my son.*

So the meaning of "sons of God" in the **Remez** interpretation sense means that in the eternal future, Believers will finally attain the status and fullest reality of what God ordained at the beginning of Creation.

CJB Genesis 1:26 ²⁶ *Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, in the likeness of ourselves;*

That is to say that we will, upon the new heavens and earth, achieve a likeness (an image) to God, and a degree of connection and intimacy with Him, that we have yet to experience and cannot in our current physical form and Universe.

We'll continue with the Sermon on the Mount next week.

