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# SERMON ON THE MOUNT

## THE KINGDOM WAY

*Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying: .....*

***Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*** (Matthew 5:3)

### EXPOSITION

Jesus gave this sermon, having been driven out into the desert, on a common mountain. Unlike the Rabbis He had no adornments of ministry. He did not even have a place to lay His head.

The Beatitudes, which start the 'Sermon on the Mount', are all about living life in the opposite way to the values of the world. The world believes it is blessed to be rich and powerful. On the physical level Jesus is saying it is blessed to be poor, if that is what we are called to be.

However, on a deeper level, there is a place in Christian maturity that we are all called to. As Matthew Henry in his Bible commentary says;

*It is to acknowledge that God is great, and we are mean; that he is holy and we are sinful; that he is all and we are nothing, less than nothing, worse than nothing; and to humble ourselves before him, and under his mighty hand....Now, (1.) This poverty in spirit is put first among the Christian graces. The philosophers did not reckon humility among their moral virtues, but Christ puts it first. Self-denial is the first lesson to be learned in his school, and poverty of spirit entitled to the first beatitude. The foundation of all other graces is laid in humility. Those who would*

*build high must begin low; and it is an excellent preparative for the entrance of gospel-grace into the soul; it fits the soil to receive the seed. Those who are weary and heavy laden, are the poor in spirit, and they shall find rest with Christ. (Regarding Matthew 5:3)*

## **TESTIMONY**

My upbringing and early life was one of confidence and success. Then... I went bankrupt in the 1987 share market crash! Financially, I was brought down with a thud! I met Jesus. He built me up again, restored my business fortunes, and gave a ministry that was successful - very successful. He brought the ministry to a virtual standstill through criticism, because the Holy Spirit was working through me. Both Kathy and I were devastated. Then I went bankrupt again. I was at both a financial and spiritual low, but this time had Jesus in my life. Pride was being ground out of my life.

A deeper understanding and ministry began to develop. I have foresworn personal earthly possessions. We own only our household furniture. We really do have to trust in the Lord to provide for the future and am often told that this is wrong and irresponsible.

Spiritually, I have deliberately avoided the titles and honorary degrees that have been offered. From Bishop to Apostle, to Pastor, to Doctor, titles come with pride attached, no matter how good the motivation of both the giver and receiver.

Without 'reverse humility', which some automatically prescribe to these situations, I, like Paul, am simply happy to be known as a servant of Jesus.

*Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus... (Philippians 1:1)*

The deeper we get into Jesus, the greater the trials and temptations we face. The greater the revelation received, the greater the cost in terms of a comfortable life. For pride is always but one step away. If you aren't prepared to pay the price, don't desire the (wrongly) perceived glory!

**Godly humility only comes at a price - the price of brokenness.**

It is an ongoing battle within each one of us. One not always won, as I know. Every compliment, and they of course help motivate us, has the potential to foster pride in our life. To truly give all the glory to Jesus (not just in words!) is the only antidote to the poison of pride.

**Lord, you have my permission to break me, so that I may be transformed into your image.**

Do not pray this unless you really mean it, for it will cost you everything. But if you do make this sacrifice, you will be blessed in ways beyond human comprehension and will inherit the kingdom of heaven!

***Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.***  
(Matthew 5:4)

## **EXPOSITION**

This is another strange blessing - in our eyes! But what sort of mourning is Jesus talking about?

It is not human mourning, which is likely to be self pity, nor the natural mourning over the death of a loved one, right and proper though that is.

Rather, it is firstly a genuine sorrow over the unworthy state of our own life when compared to the righteousness and holiness of God. Not 'woe is me' but an acknowledgement that we have not yet reached the place that our God desires us to be.

Secondly, it is a godly concern over the state of others. This is to be reflected in both a grieving for those who are unsaved and sinful along with the ability to empathise with others who are going through hard times in their lives.

## **TESTIMONY**

When we first walk with Jesus and make basic changes in our lives, we can easily start to feel we have done well - and so we have. But as we get deeper into relationship with Him, becoming closer to Him, the more we start to understand how far away from being like Him we really are. I have certainly found this to be the case in my life. Hence, one of my favorite 'David's Doodlings'.

## **The closer I get to God, the further away I realise I actually am.**

While it often is relatively easy to get rid of many (though not all) of the 'thou shalt nots' in life, it is much more difficult to develop the 'thou shalts', which are really the heart of becoming like Jesus.

Not all are called to be evangelists, but we are all called to evangelise. How? Firstly, through prayer for those we specifically know need Jesus. I find women are far better at this than us men - and me in particular! Secondly, it is by being as Jesus to others. This is of course, harder to do to those closest to us, as they know us best, all too well seeing our weaknesses!

My wife would say I was born without natural empathy! And she would be right, for I have always been a task focused person. Can I change myself? Well, I can be aware of my nature and temper the extremes of it. But basically, it needs God to change me to give me a heart for others.

So how does He do this? Firstly, I have to be willing to be changed! This is a challenge, for we all resist change. But being a little open, God has done at least two things to help change me.

I have been blessed to be a basically fit, healthy and active person. Hospital visiting etc., was not my thing. Then, my friend Gary who had greatly helped me in ministry got terminal cancer. The Lord had me spend time with him. It was hard. Not only was my friend dying but I had no skills or experience in handling the situation. I had to let Jesus do it. Gradually it became easier as I learned from Jesus. Since then, I have had a mini ministry to people with cancer. Some have died, others recovered. It is never easy, but Jesus has changed me to be able to cope with these situations and to be a blessing to

the people.

He also gave me the 'Praise God it's Monday' newsletter, as an encouragement to those in ministry, that is, all believers. Sometimes I know I fail, but many thousands are still reading it now! When I first started, 14 years ago, the writings were more general and less challenging - of me and you. I know a few would like me to go back to that style. To have a laugh, maybe make a point, and then both of us go back to how we were.

The last few years though, there has been both a change in me and I believe, in the general spiritual atmosphere. God is pressing more urgently in these latter days to develop His kingdom. Not just in me, but through many, many, kingdom followers worldwide. There is a sense of urgency and excitement building in my spirit. I have a burden to share it with you. I apologise if I sometimes offend or seem to have lost the plot. But I do trust that, on the whole, you are getting the gist of the major change of direction God is calling us to today. A movement away from 'this church', and 'that church', to simply all being 'the church', the living kingdom of God on the earth.

No, I have not become perfect, nor are any at this time. But we are open to being changed into the image of Jesus. For we earnestly desire to be part of the perfect bride for whom Jesus is returning.

*7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) (Revelation 19:7-8)*

**Is it your desire to be a part of the bride too?**



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

*(Matthew 5:5)*

## **EXPOSITION**

In human thought we so easily substitute a 'w' for the 'm' in meek, then reject this statement of Jesus!

Yet Matthew Henry's Bible Commentary puts a completely different slant upon it.....

*The meek are those who quietly submit themselves to God, to his word and to his rod, who follow his directions, and comply with his designs, and are gentle towards all men (Tit. 3:2).... which says;*

*2 to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men. (Titus 2:3)*

Interestingly this is virtually (in spite of what prosperity preachers preach!) the only express temporal promise in the New Testament. For the meek will inherit the earth. Amazing!

In essence though, this command of Jesus is similar to the ones that preceded it - be obedient to God and His will for our life. If we do so, then these behaviors will automatically develop, as they are of God.

## **TESTIMONY**

As meekness is so easily confused with weakness, it is very hard to live out in the world, particularly for a person who is task motivated and success

driven.

The first thing we have to learn is that we (me) are not the centre of the universe, round which everything else revolves. Leaders will always struggle with this, for they see their role is to lead, with others to follow. Living in peaceful harmony with others when things don't go our way, is both difficult to accept and enact.

For most of us, this does get easier with age, when perhaps, in the natural, we become less driven and more accepting of others. However, true meekness or humility has to come from God.

I have found over the years that as I get closer to God, He will change me, as I allow Him to. It is always a two way street. Submission must come before change happens.

The week this was written was figuratively been 'a week from hell', as far as staffing at *Seekers* was concerned. We had a wedding involving a number of the staff, two funerals and a 'big' birthday to contend with, which meant that several staff were away when we needed them most. To compound the problem, it was a busy week, for me, of preparation for a new shop at Masterton, 300km away, that was opening in 3 weeks. Everything that could go wrong did! A huge test for me! I so nearly lost it! Some staff were aware of my displeasure, but I didn't 'lose it' with any.

In the end, thanks so much to our dear friend Mihi, who arranged for a team of people to come and assist with painting 96 clothing racks, as well as looking after the shop when we were 'staffless', everything got done. Thank you so much Mihi, and also Graeme, for all your help too. Graeme even

brought his friend Noel to do some painting on the morning of Noel's wedding day! That takes some beating as a pre-wedding experience!

Meekness often fails under pressure. Pressure tells us how much our lives have really changed round. I wasn't perfect, but much improved on what I would have been like, say 10 years ago.

**How about you?**

***Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*** (Matthew 5:6)

## **EXPOSITION**

There are two meanings accorded to this beatitude.

Firstly, we can look from a melancholy, physical viewpoint. A spiritual blessing will be given to those, who because of their search for righteousness suffer physical deprivation.

Secondly, we can take the spiritual perspective. Those with a hunger for knowing God more and becoming like Jesus, through living a righteous life, will be spiritually blessed.

## **TESTIMONY**

A natural characteristic of my nature is to give my all to what I do.

In the physical, whether it is at work or in sport, I do my best to do my best. I remember at school (some time ago now!) competing in the annual, compulsory, cross country running race, being in third place (out of a hundred or two) with just two boys, twins actually, from the year ahead of me out in front. John, a tremendous runner, was well ahead, and his brother Robert, 50 metres in front of me. I resigned myself to third place. When Robert got to the finishing line he collapsed, completely exhausted. I arrived a few seconds later, still with some energy left. I could have beaten Robert, had I not been wrongly convinced in my own mind that he was going to beat me. I learned a lesson that day, to give my best, even when things seem

impossible.

When I accepted Jesus as a 42 year old, it too, had to be all or nothing. In my early life I had been a 'churchian', before becoming disillusioned and moving out into the world for 15 years or so. Coming back into the church, this time as a genuine believer, I read my Bible, listened to sermons, attended teaching sessions and courses absorbing what I learned to gradually change my life. A process of change that still continues today and will, I trust, into the future.

But over the years, I have discovered that hungering for righteousness, of seeking to become like Jesus, is more than attending church and being involved in its activities. Indeed, discovered that righteousness is a state of 'being' rather than one of 'doing'. This has been a profound, life changing, progressive revelation to me.

Some readers think I 'slag' the traditional church system. This is neither my heart, nor my intention at all. My desire, with all my weaknesses and failings, is simply to become more like Jesus personally and to see 'the church', however you define it, move in a similar direction. To achieve this it is necessary to change our focus away from the 'institution' of the church to the 'person' of Jesus.

The church has not made one single person righteous. It is only Jesus, through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, who can turn around our lives to live as the Father desires. The church is not to be an end in itself, but rather the means to an end. The physicality of property, position and programmes has taken precedence over the biblically ordained spiritual role of leading people to Christ and building believers into disciples, encouraging

hunger for, and developing, righteousness in one's life.

Attending meetings and doing good works can lead to a form of righteousness or godliness, but as we see today, it is one without power. I will leave you with a warning from the Bible. Please don't blame me! These are not my words!

*But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— 5 **having a form of godliness but denying its power.** Have nothing to do with them. (2 Timothy 3:1-5)*

**May we, the church, not become as these.**

***Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.***

*(Matthew 5:7)*

## **EXPOSITION**

Matthew Henry puts it better than I can.

*"The merciful are happy, v. 7. This, like the rest, is a paradox; for the merciful are not taken to be the wisest, nor are likely to be the richest; yet Christ pronounces them blessed. Those are the merciful, who are piously and charitably inclined to pity, help, and succour persons in misery. A man may be truly merciful, who has not wherewithal to be bountiful or liberal; and then God accepts the willing mind. We must not only bear our own afflictions patiently, but we must, by Christian sympathy, partake of the afflictions of our brethren; pity must be shown (Job 6:14), and bowels of mercy put on (Col. 3:12); and, being put on, they must put forth themselves in contributing all we can for the assistance of those who are any way in misery. We must have compassion on the souls of others, and help them; pity the ignorant, and instruct them; the careless, and warn them; those who are in a state of sin, and snatch them as brands out of the burning..... One of the purest and most refined delights in this world, is that of doing good. In this word, Blessed are the merciful, is included that saying of Christ, which otherwise we find not in the gospels, It is more blessed to give than to receive, Acts 20:35.*

*Henry, Matthew, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997.*

## **TESTIMONY**

Another area of challenge in my life!

My wife would say I have (had) the mercy of a pinhead! Not in such words,

mind you, but I do get the point!

In the natural I am hard on myself, and have high expectations of others, but not as high as I have of me, if that makes sense. Therefore, pastoring is not a gifting I am blessed with in great quantities! Empathy has never been a strong point!

But God does change us - if we let Him. Over the years I have mellowed and He has put me in situations, such as those with cancer sufferers that I talked about earlier, that have necessitated some development of this trait. People do now seem able to bring me their problems and get a sympathetic ear, particularly if they are genuinely prepared, where it is possible, to take practical steps to overcome them.

While some of the most merciful among you may not agree with me, I believe that while Jesus showed tremendous mercy, He also was quite definite in wanting people to change their lives. An example is the woman caught in adultery.

*10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." (John 8:10-11)*

Shortly after becoming a Christian, God gave me a prophetic word for a necessary reconciliation required for a particular church. Before taking the word to the church concerned I spoke to a godly lady who had once been a part of that church. She agreed that it was accurate but gave me an additional Scripture with which to conclude - just the end part of the verse in



bold.

*12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. **Mercy triumphs over judgment!** (James 2:12-13)*

I have never forgotten that - even if I have not always applied it!

The second basic area of mercy Matthew Henry comments on is that of doing good to others. This really is a key point of witness of our faith to the world. For doing good without expectation of something in return is a key element that distinguishes a follower of Jesus from most other people in the world.

For Kathy and I, completely unexpectedly to me, this came in the form of *Seekers Megamarts* where we raised funds for development projects for Africa, as well as assisting our local communities with affordable recycled clothing.

I said, 'completely unexpectedly to me', as I thought I would be in full time writing, internet and travelling ministry forever, as I had been for the 7 previous years. However, before travelling to Africa for what turned out to be the last time for 10 years, the Lord prepared me by saying that He had given me most of the revelation He wanted to give, and now would come a time of getting it out. Then, when in Africa, He led me, kicking and struggling, wondering whether it was Him or not, into the idea of the clothing. It took off and expanded to 10 shops before being sold after 8 years in operation. I believe it gave me a better balance in my life between faith and works.

No, I have not got there in terms of mercy yet, but the Lord is working on it. He has to, for it is outside my ability to change, as indeed is the application of all the Beatitudes. While some prefer to put them to one side as being too idealistic, I believe that the Lord is calling His end time church, His bride, through submission of our lives to Him, to live out the Beatitudes in our daily lives. I know, it is impossible in my own strength. But in and through Him, all things are possible.

**He can even change me! And you!**

***Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*** (Matthew 5:8)

## **EXPOSITION**

This is the greatest promise of all the beatitudes, but is also the hardest to attain to.

We are to have a pure heart, devoid of earthly lusts and desires. If we do so, the promise is that we will see God, not just at a future time in heaven, but on earth, now. In doing so we will become part of the 'bride of Christ' for which Jesus is returning.

## **TESTIMONY**

This beatitude is both the most important, and will become the most controversial, in this time of revelation of God's kingdom being not just in heaven but truly being established upon the earth. Why? Because 99.999% of Christians (including me), have not yet reached this place.

Yet Jesus is to return for a perfect bride.

*7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) (Revelation 19:7-8)*

I am sure that if we are both being honest, we will agree that we haven't reached this level of purity of thought and living yet. And, continuing in the

honesty vein, we would admit that it is impossible to achieve in our own strength.

Over the past years, as the Lord has shown me a little of what is to come. In my humanness, I have thought that it is impossible, likely just my imagination! Yet, in more recent times, I have found that there are many others that the Lord has, and is, giving the same, impossible vision to.

One lesson I have learned is, no matter how I might try, I cannot achieve a life of purity through my own efforts. I fall far short of wearing a pure white robe. For I know my thoughts are not God's thoughts, as He indeed explained through Isaiah.

*8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)*

However, I believe the way of the end times is to be different to what we have seen, both in our own lives and in the church. For we live in New Covenant (Testament) times.

*46 The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. 47 The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. 48 As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, **so also are those who are of heaven.** 49 And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, **so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.** (1 Corinthians 15:46-9)*

My friend, we are on a walk with Jesus. I don't know the turns the path is going to take, but I am confident that as long as I allow myself to be led by

my Saviour, I will end up at the place promised in Romans.

*19 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:19-23)*

While the world may be descend into recession and gloom, the future for sold out believers has never looked brighter!

**"Lord, I give You my permission to change me into the one you would desire me to be."**

***Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. (Matthew 5:9)***

## **EXPOSITION**

This is talking about making peace amongst groups of people with divergent opinions, often considered to be the role of a pastor or minister. It is not referring to world peace, which we know will not happen, until temporarily, during the time of the antichrist. True universal peace will only come with the return of Jesus.

## **TESTIMONY**

Peacemaking would not be a natural attribute of mine! Ask my wife!

I am not deliberately antagonistic, but in the natural, have been driven to achieve the goals I set myself.

Over the years however, as Jesus has changed my life (and perhaps also with the 'more years') I have 'mellowed' in my attitudes and behaviors. While peacemaking is still not my strongpoint, it is not so much a negative in my life either.

One problem I have observed in the church is that peacemaking, by its very nature, leads to compromise. This is a good thing in inconsequential areas, as Paul pointed out,

*5 One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the*

*Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. 7 For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. 8 If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. (Romans 14:5-8)*

However, when it compromises basic truths, which is often the case in our modern society, based upon relative morality, peacemaking can so easily slip into error.

Oh, if only life was easy!

So, I need to stand on the truths the Lord has imparted to me to share, but with wisdom, appreciating and understanding that you may not have the same revelation, and certainly not to condemn you for that. Humility and peacemaking walk hand in hand.

I look forward to that seemingly impossible day (in human understanding, at least) when

*... we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13)*

Then we will be at peace - with one another, if not the world.

**To be seen as sons of God we must be peacemakers. May we both remember, next time we feel to provoke or continue an argument!**

***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. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:10-12)***

## **EXPOSITION**

The final and most highly emphasized beatitude!

1. We are to be hunted down as 'wild beasts'.
2. Reviled, mocked and persecuted.
3. This is all to develop righteousness in us.

We will be blessed to stand up for Christ, shall inherit the kingdom of heaven now and also receive heavenly reward. The prophets suffered in the same way and we must rejoice and be glad in our suffering.

## **TESTIMONY**

Living in the Western society which is New Zealand, with its relative freedom of religious expression, it is difficult to comprehend this final beatitude. Certainly, Christianity has gone from being mainstream when I was growing up, to now, a minority grouping within society. We may receive ridicule from the humanistic elite and, as has always been the case, from those who choose to live of 'debauchery'. Yet, at this time, 'persecution' is not a word



that could be applied to my life experience.

When I look back through history and round the world today however, it is clear that persecution has always accompanied cutting edge Christianity. To make matters worse, Christian has even persecuted Christian!

Christianity, with its message of internal peace (as we saw above) in an antagonistic world, is a revolutionary message and way of life. Jesus was a 'peaceful revolutionary'! Hard for believers to understand, with our human understanding, and impossible for the world to comprehend.

Jesus promised us persecution!

*20 Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. (John 15:20a)*

To the martyr comes the ultimate reward.

*9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. 10 They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" 11 Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed. (Revelation 6:9-11)*

Real, all out, full on, Christianity develops most rapidly under persecution. The persecuted church both exists and is growing today. The 10 countries where the greatest persecution exists, according to International Christian Concern are; 1 North Korea, 2 Iraq, 3 Saudi Arabia, 4 Somalia, 5 India, 6

China, 7 Pakistan, 8 Iran, 9 Eritrea and 10 Vietnam.

To be honest, I have no real desire to be persecuted! Yet, I can see how persecution both tests and strengthens the faith of genuine believers.

**Lord, may your will be done in me, no matter the cost.**

## ***Salt and Light***

***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. 15 Neither 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.***

***16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16)***

### **EXPOSITION**

*Salt:* Salt was required in the sacrifices of the Old Testament. We are therefore to sacrifice ourselves in spreading the 'flavour' of the salt of The Word to the world. We are to live as salt, adding flavour to the community. If we, as Christians do not reflect godly behaviour in our lives, we are rejected by God and to be rejected by the church. Tough words these!

*Light:* Similarly, we are to be beacons of light to the world, by our actions reflecting the pure light of Jesus in the darkness, which is the world of sin.

### **TESTIMONY**

There is a seeming contradiction between separation from the world and being salt and light in it.

I guess this is something I have struggled with over the years. Wanting to become more like Jesus seems to be easier to attain to if you largely withdraw from the temptations of the world. Many of us have developed a siege mentality in our churches, effectively locking ourselves away in the security of church surroundings and walls in order to avoid the world.

I have been down this path too but have come to realise, particularly in more recent times, that we need to be out in the world in order for our light to shine and our salt to add flavour.

This is tough, but it is the 'kingdom way'.

Kingdom living must be reflected through our behaviour in our homes, our schools, our workplaces, indeed in all the areas of activity of our life.

For seven years I was involved in full time ministry. This was mostly great. I was a Christian taking a message primarily to other Christians. I thought this was the highest and permanent calling for me for the rest of my life.

Then the Lord took me back into business with *Seekers*. "Lord, is this You?" was my cry.

Over the next 8 years I have come to understand more of how the Lord desires us to be salt and light in the community.

In the business we have both believers and non-believers on our staff. My life, both good and bad, witnesses to them. I just trust that the good outweighs the bad and that my light isn't switched off too often! Then we had the customers to whom we are offering a social service, providing good used clothing at affordable prices. Finally, there were the people in Africa whom we endeavored to help through aid projects.

Of course, the internet ministry, if not the travel, continued alongside this.

This is the real world, where real people live, and where we can most effectively be salt and light.

Inevitably this means we will also expose our weaknesses, those areas where we have not yet been fully refined in the fire. I know only too well!

If we are to be effective in building the kingdom now, being salt and light cannot be limited to hours on Sunday but must be reflected in our actions all week.

May the Lord help us all as we seek to live for Him.

## ***The Fulfillment of the Law***

***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.***

***18 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.***

***19 Anyone 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.***

***20 For 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. (Matthew 5:17-20)***

### **EXPOSITION:**

The Pharisees made a show of outwardly keeping the Law. However their hearts weren't right before God. Jesus didn't come to throw out the Law but to have us live out the law with our whole being, both internal by motivation and external by actions.

### **TESTIMONY:**

This is a theme that is frequently misinterpreted today - both ways. Some say we can ignore the Old Testament completely, which is patently wrong, as Jesus said here. Others go back to the pedantic nature of Old Testament Law and ignore the New Testament principle of grace. This can be a real temptation amongst those who have a real heart for Israel and its traditions. Some, in fact, have converted to Judaism, for it remains based upon the Law.

I am a person who gives my best to what I am committed to. Upon becoming a follower of Jesus in my early 40's, through bankruptcy, I tried my best to live in a way that would be pleasing to Him. I am pretty determined and disciplined and was able to make many changes in my life - at least in outward appearances, reminiscent of the Law. I was pleased with my life and progress. As I saw it, if this process continued, I would achieve my goal of becoming much more like Him at some future time. I returned to financial prosperity, ministry grew and all was good.

Then, the unthinkable happened! I went bankrupt for a second time, trying to secure our financial future for full time ministry without being a burden on others. We had been double tithing, contributing to our churches building programme, helping others out and paying for 1000's of discipleship courses to be distributed within New Zealand and overseas. How could things go so wrong?!

My second bankruptcy has brought me deeper into Jesus. I now realise how unlike Him I am. I understand that while I may have looked good on the outside (Law), on the inside I am far from Him. I also have learned that while I should not deliberately do wrong, internal change cannot come from

within through my own efforts, but only by submitting to my Lord and allowing Him to change me (Grace).

In order for me to change from being like the Pharisees and become like Him, I have to let go of me! Allow Him to take control of my life.

I have discovered that just like the fallacy of 'easy Christianity' (say a prayer and live how you like), there is no such thing as easy grace either. Surely that is a heresy, David!

No, it is not! God's gracious grace is given to us not as band aid to cover the cuts and bruises of our bad behaviour, but as an internal medicine to change us from within into the likeness of Jesus. We need to open our 'mouth of submission' to swallow what can be a 'not so tasty' medicine.

I understand that this may be difficult to understand for we are so imbued with the idea that grace comes from a Father Christmas Jesus, at no cost to anyone.

But grace cost Jesus His life, a painful death on a lonely cross, forsaken by His Father and His followers. So, if we are to become like Him, grace will cost us our life too. Then, as promised, through righteousness we can enter the kingdom of heaven - now.



## **Murder**

**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.' 22 But 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, 24 leave 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.**

**26 I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.** (Matthew 5: 21-26)

### **EXPOSITION:**

This is generally considered to be an extension of the Sixth Commandment 'Thou shalt not kill'. However this is not actually correct, as the Rabbis had

interpreted the commandment too narrowly. Jesus gave us the true explanation of the meaning of the commandment, which applies to thoughts and motivation as well as actual actions. In essence, we are to readily forgive and live in peace with one another.

## **TESTIMONY:**

It would be fair to say that each of us has broken the 'Jesus explanation' of this commandment many times. I am no exception! For anger and resentment are both parts of the human condition.

While I have never had more than a 'normal(!)' anger problem, I certainly noticed a difference in my behaviour once I gave my heart to Jesus and tried to walk more in His image. Part of this may be due to the mellowing of age, but more to an understanding that getting angry and retaining resentment or unforgiveness does not do me any good!

Of course, we must learn from bad experiences, but carrying their memory simply leads to a bitterness of personality that is likely to shorten our lives as well as being most unattractive to others.

Self-control does have a part to play in controlling anger, as seen in the 'anger management' programmes taught in the world. Understanding our triggers and walking away from potentially explosive situations certainly helps.

However, like the rest of the Mount Sermon, the only real answer is a change of character through submission to the will of the Father through the guidance of the Holy Spirit to become like Jesus in character.

This is not an formula for instant success but a process that takes a lifetime.  
I am still 'work-in-progress' in this area, as in many others of my life.

I trust you are too.

## ***Adultery***

***27 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.***

***29 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. 30 And 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.*** (Matthew 5:27-30)

### **EXPOSITION:**

Like the previous exposition about anger being included with murder, so this explanation of the seventh commandment was again given by Jesus to correct earlier incorrect teachings by the Pharisees. Thoughts as well as actions were to be included.

### **TESTIMONY:**

Before commencing this series, I read through the Scripture, saw this section, and dreaded having to write about it! For I am red blooded man and being honest, have heaps of problems in living out the righteous 'Jesus interpretation' of this commandment.

I know that many male readers will experience the same challenge with these words of Jesus too! Females - I don't know about, nor will I pretend to understand!

I understand the importance Jesus placed on this with his descriptive advice of what to do about it! Fortunately He said it to make a point, not be taken literally, otherwise nearly all men would be blind, at the very least!

'Girls, gold and glory' are the three '3G' major downfalls of men. (How about 'glamour, gossip and generational' for women?)

I simply ask for His forgiveness and pray that as I take on more of His character, I might become more like Him. Please help me Lord.

## **Divorce**

**31 "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'**

**32 But 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.** (Matthew 5:31-32)

### **EXPOSITION:**

Jewish men had a cavalier approach to divorce. Initially it was simply by word of mouth but was codified by Moses into a Certificate of Divorce upon the acquiring of a written language. This had the effect of removing divorce from a simple act of passion in the heat of the moment to a more measured legal document. However, divorce could be had for any reason.

Jesus changed this radically both in these verses and in later teachings.

*7 "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" 8 Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. 9 I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."* (Matthew 19:7-9)

### **TESTIMONY:**

Obviously, in the modern Western world this command is being ignored both in the world itself and in the church.

My wife Kathy and I have been married 46 years this year. This would once have been regarded as normal but now is considered exceptional. We have had our ups and downs. As our friends would say, Kathy is an exceptionally forgiving woman! Joking aside, our marriage, any marriage, needs to be worked at in order for it to remain healthy. Taking each other for granted surely is the start of the downward spiral.

Of course, we have to be real and face the fact that in our society there are many who are separated and divorced. The church has faced or ignored this dilemma concerning remarriage and reacted in various ways. It is obvious that Jesus wasn't in favour of it, as recorded in Matthew 19:9 above, and in other places throughout the New Testament.

However I do also know the power of God's mercy, not as a license to do wrong but rather, as with the woman at the well, to enable recovery from a wrong situation.

*12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment! (James 2:12-13)*

## **Oaths**

**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.' 34 But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne;**

**35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.**

**37 Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.** (Matthew 5:33-37)

### **EXPOSITION:**

The Jews were generally reluctant to use the name of God in vain. In fact they venerated it so much that they would not even write it in full. However, they swore on other things and made oaths. In this exposition of the third commandment, Jesus called on us all not to swear upon anything, but simply to say 'yes' or 'no'.

### **TESTIMONY:**

In our modern world, we do not generally make a habit of swearing on things as much as the Jews did, but swearing, using God's name (including Jesus and the Holy Spirit) is endemic in our Western society.



Sadly, the use of other 'bad language' also, commonly known as swearing, is becoming more and more common amongst Christians also.

Personally, perhaps because I was brought up in a home where this was unacceptable, it probably became ingrained in me early in life and so has not been a problem personally for me.

It is however, one of the first areas that can slip if we are not careful, as is illustrated by the language many Christians are using today.

Interestingly, not using foul language is one obvious sign of difference in believers to people of the world. When we let our yes and no stand for and by themselves without being embellished with expletives, it stands out to others who don't.

The main area where oaths are required today is in the legal system. Whether or not to swear upon the Bible is an individual matter of choice. Personally I do not have a problem with this.

I do have a problem though with societies or organisations requiring one to swear an oath in order to join. I simply would not join.

When one thinks about the things we so easily and naturally do in life, the wisdom of Jesus in this matter is clear to see. May we take it on board in our life.

## ***An Eye for an Eye***

***38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' 39 But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.***

***40 And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.***

***42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*** (Matthew 5:38-42)

### **EXPOSITION:**

This is a change from the Old Testament law of retaliation. There, the decisions were only meant to be applied by a magistrate, and except in the case of murder, a monetary compensation could be substituted. However, by the time of Jesus this law was being misinterpreted, to wrongly allow individuals to take the law into their own hands.

In essence, Jesus is teaching us two things here.

1. We must not seek revenge from those who hurt us.
2. We must only not hurt our neighbours, but seek to do them good at all times.

## **TESTIMONY:**

We have a legal system! We have rights! (In fact today, we are taught our rights but not our responsibilities!) Surely then, we should use them to get justice for ourselves?

Not according to Jesus!

Forgiveness is a hard lesson for all of us to learn. Some say 'revenge is sweet', but what I have observed is that the desire for revenge leads to bitterness which remains, even when revenge is obtained!

Bitterness eats away our soul like a voracious cancer. Forgiveness, on the other hand, is a soothing balm for the soul.

But our human nature screams out for revenge when we are hurt. That is our immediate reaction, both mine and yours, when we are wronged.

To not hold grudges, is something I have had to learn over the years of my walk with Jesus. This is particularly true with other Christians and in the church, where many are hurt the most!

I remember one occasion where I was accorded a position by a denominational grouping, not at my request, but which was then protested and revoked by my local pastor, as I had not done the formal training and filled in the proper paperwork.

When my pastor told me, I was graceful about it, and he commented that I took it very well. Of course I learned a lesson from it, but have not held any

grudge. And I have an inner peace about it that I could not have had, had I become bitter about a perceived injustice.

Often, those closest to us hurt us the most. One Saturday night I was at a meeting where the speaker, one of New Zealand's more prominent pastors, talked of a recent experience where his daughter had offended him greatly. He wanted her to apologise and she wouldn't. He got bitter about it and it starting affecting his enthusiasm for ministry.

Finally, in a meeting in our neighboring country of Australia (yes - some good things come out of Australia! [Just friendly Kiwi - Aussie rivalry! Don't worry I am not getting bitter!]), the speaker had a word of prophecy directly for him as he sat far away, up in the balcony, "Love the one who has wronged you." Not exactly what he wanted to hear! But his enthusiasm immediately returned! He came home, took his daughter back into their home and simply loved her. Within a week she had apologised to all the family for her actions.

Not all cases work out as well as this, but even if she hadn't expressed forgiveness, the pastor himself was back in the place where his ministry could regain its effectiveness.

Yes bitterness can happen to anyone at any time.

**"Lord may I be open and responsive to your wisdom in my dealings with others."**

## ***Love for Enemies***

***43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that 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. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?***

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

(Matthew 5:43-48)

### **EXPOSITION:**

This is an exposition of the true meaning of the fundamental law, 'love thy neighbour'. The Jews had incorrectly, according to the Law, come to the understanding that loving their Jewish neighbour was different to loving their enemies in the area, eg Samaritans, or country, eg Egypt, next door. They had fought with these people for centuries and now Jesus was reminding and telling them, and us, to love our enemies!

Jesus realised that this would be the ultimate challenge, hence the call to perfection.

## **TESTIMONY:**

I am of a generation born after World War 2, living in an island nation that has had no real human enemies during my lifetime. While we have been caught up in other people's wars, our army has consisted solely of volunteers, not conscripts. Therefore personally, I have not experienced war. I appreciate that this may be different for you. So I cannot honestly testify in that area.

Inevitably, in the course of life, particularly if we are ones who stand up for principles, and do things, rather than simply go with the flow, we are likely to offend, indeed anger, others. Sadly, it is a fact of life that relationships do break down from time to time. This is particularly hurtful when it is with those whom we have previously been close to. 'Family feuds' are classic cases of this.

In our church family too, disagreements easily grow out of control, the devil sticking in and twisting his knife with great glee in order to separate and alienate God's people. And we, all too often, are willing targets! Friends become enemies, all in the name of 'religion' or 'theology'. Certainly not in the name of Jesus!

While hatred has never been a particular trait of mine, lack of love certainly has. Interestingly, I have learned that enemies in the personal area are largely created by my actions, not theirs. An enemy becomes an enemy only when we allow them to be one.

For sure people may hate us, but if we react to them in love rather than respond in like manner, their hatred is likely to be challenged. Hatred builds

hatred. While we might hate people's actions we are to love the people. Unfortunately, when we rightfully stand on moral principles, we too often condemn the person as well. And hatred develops.

Homosexuality is an example of this. I do understand that people will attempt to vilify us for our stand, but the ideal of Jesus, expressed here, is that our reaction is not to match theirs, but rather, still to be as Jesus to them. Even when we are misunderstood! As Jesus well understood, this is particularly hard to do. Hence He gave His perfection comments.

It is hard for us not to let hatred affect us. I have had a family experience of this. My father (unwittingly) became one of the leaders of the anti-homosexual lobby at the time of the bill to legalize homosexuality in New Zealand. Undoubtedly, the criticism and undeserved hatred he received shortened his life.

None has reached perfection yet (if we had we would not die!) so we are all 'work in progress' in this area.

**Lord, give us the revelation and will to love our enemies, for we cannot do it in our own strength.**

## ***Giving to the Needy***

***"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.***

***3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*** (Matthew 6:1-4)

### **EXPOSITION:**

There are 3 basic requirements of the believer; giving, praying and fasting. The next three beatitudes deal with these in turn.

In essence, the (compulsory) giving of alms to the poor should be done on the basis of need, not of show. Once again this was promulgated by the ostentatious excesses of the Rabbis and Pharisees of the time of Jesus. They made a show of giving, but in reality gave little at all. Jesus uncovered their hypocrisy.

We can either be glorified by men for our generosity, or by God. The choice is ours.



## **TESTIMONY:**

This was a big problem for me in the operation of *Seekers Megamarts*! And I am not sure that I have the answer!

The objective of our charitable trust was to provide money and clothing to assist the people of Africa who so desperately need help.

In order to attract both donations of goods and to attract customers to our shops, we publicised this fact.

Hence, my picture was on the front of a local newspaper as we sent our first container of clothes away to Africa. I must admit, when I saw the photo on the cover, I was firstly very surprised, and secondly, shocked by the very grey hair I saw! Surely a reflection from the flash! Vanity, vanity, too! What hope is there for me!!!

Seriously though, it is so easy to slip from doing good deeds as God commands and leads to a situation of glorifying self.

One lady I met during the week told me how addictive doing community service was, as people looked up to you for it! Sadly, I could see what she meant.

I believe that Jesus looks at the heart motivations of what we do in all areas of our lives. What are our actions intended to do Glorify God or promote ourselves? The balance can be very fine. Hence the warning given in this beatitude.

**May I, may we, never forget and give Him all the honour and the glory. Amen.**

## **Prayer**

**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.**

**6 But 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.**

**8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (Matthew 6:5-8)**

### **EXPOSITION:**

*Note, Those who would not do as the hypocrites do in their ways and actions must not be as the hypocrites are in their frame and temper. He names nobody, but it appears by ch. 23:13, that by the hypocrites here he means especially the scribes and Pharisees. Now there were two great faults they were guilty of in prayer, against each of which we are here cautioned—vain-glory (v. 5, 6); and vain repetitions, v. 7, 8.*

*Henry, Matthew, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997.*

### **TESTIMONY:**

This is such a huge subject on the one hand, yet so simple on the other!

Breakdowns in communication, both between people and between people and God, are at the heart of most of the problems of our daily lives, between nations, and between the church and God. The heart of the problem is that we look at life through the colored spectacles of motivation and prejudice, hearing what we want to hear and saying what our life experience programmes us to say. In our humanness, being basically self-centered, most of us tend to speak (or think) somewhat more easily and often than we listen.

In our relationship with God, our humanness tends to come out even more, as God is physically unseen, yet has power over the universe. We so easily feel we can ignore His desires for us while giving Him a shopping list of how He can make our lives more comfortable! Sorry to be so straightforward, maybe even outrageous, but it applies to me as much as anyone else! How often do we regard our God as a great Father Christmas in the sky?

Of course, we give God thanks, may praise and worship Him too, and pray for others. This is all very worthy and good. But seldom do we simply sit in the solitude of internal quietness and let Him speak His heart out to us and for us. We want to hear His word for us through the prophet, yet do not wait upon Him to talk to us directly. Yet good two way communication is at the heart of every successful relationship, in both the natural and the spiritual.

Over the years, as I have grown a little in God, I have come to realise and appreciate that it is not all about me, but progressively developed through Him and me to finally, all about Him. I try now to seek, sometimes more successfully than others, His will for me, rather than mine for Him! This doesn't happen all the time, for at times I am closer to Him than at others,

or He might choose to test me for a season by letting me be seemingly alone for a time.

The 'vain glory' and 'vain repetition' that Matthew Henry mentions above are classic examples of communication breakdown. We easily try to impress others, rather than speaking to the intended recipient, or repeat others' words because we don't know what to say ourselves.

The ideal for me, which I have not yet achieved, is to have an open conduit to God 24/7, so we can talk to each other on an ongoing basis. A spiritual cellphone! 'Txts' to God!

Prayer meetings are good to bring people together and to petition God on behalf of a group, but the essence of prayer is personal communication with our Lord, away from the public eye, on a one to one basis. And most importantly, is then doing what He tells to do.

I am far from perfect. My prayer life, my cellphone with God, sometimes runs out of battery (of spiritual charge) or I wander outside the reception area (of desire or sin)!

I guess both you and I are 'works in progress'. May we be open to His leading and guiding in our lives, through prayer, today.

May we too, be like Jesus at Gethsemane, who was obedient even to a death, a death more horrible than anyone else has ever experienced.

*39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." (Matthew 26:39)*

Now for the second part of Jesus' instruction on prayer.

**9 "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

**13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' (ADDED FROM KJV 13b. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.)**

**14 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.** (Matthew 6:9-15)

## **EXPOSITION:**

There are 3 parts to what we know as the Lord's Prayer (More accurately the 'Disciples Prayer'.)

1. THE PREFACE - stating whom we are addressing our prayer to.
2. THE PETITIONS - of which there are 6, the first 3 relating to God and the last 3 to our own concerns.
3. THE CONCLUSION - in which all glory is given to God.

## **TESTIMONY:**

It is impossible to discuss the multitudinous aspects and depth of this amazing 'model' prayer here.

Sadly, over the years, through many repetitive, rote utterances, the 'sacredness' and depth of meaning of this prayer has been largely lost, until (particularly in charismatic and pentecostal churches) it has become largely ignored in worship services.

Yet there is a new revelation of its meaning coming to a wider and wider group of people who are starting to understand that this prayer is talking not about the future, but the establishment of God's kingdom upon earth in the here and now.

If the petitions of this prayer were fully reflected in our behaviour God's kingdom would come upon the earth! For the coming of His kingdom (*your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*) is dependent upon our complete devotion to Him and full submission to His will. If we truly lived the lifestyle of the remaining petitions, *11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.* we really would be kingdom people. Not forgetting of course, the 'conditional key' contained in the final verse. *15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.* Oh dear!

Yes, you may accuse me of being idealistic! And I fully concede that I don't live up to this prayer all the time. And I cannot in my own power. But there is a new day dawning, one when the Holy Spirit is to be poured out upon the earth in greater measure than we have experienced in the past.

*The Day of the Lord*



*28 'And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. 29 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. 30 I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. (Joel 2:28-30)*

At this time, through the power of the Holy Spirit, those who choose to make the sacrifice will herald the return of Jesus becoming the pure, perfect bride whom Jesus is coming to marry.

*7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) (Revelation 19:7-8)*

Impossible? Not according to God's Word. What will you, what will I, choose to believe?

## ***The Narrow and Wide Gates***

***"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. (Matthew 7:13-14)***

### **EXPOSITION:**

There are two ways of life, represented by the two gates. The majority will enter the wide gate of easy living which leads to hell. The minority will choose a life of change, of trial and testing, in order to finally conform to the image of Jesus. It is these faithful ones who will receive their eternal heavenly reward.

Most things in life, I do wholeheartedly. For that is my nature. If I commit to something, I will, most times, give it my all.

In coming to Jesus, in my forties, I had come to the end of my natural, human tether.

Walking on the wide road was easy in many ways, although I still tripped up many times. I had plenty of company! It was downhill all the way. Downhill to destruction!

My way hadn't worked. I needed to make a new start. I chose to commit my life to Jesus.

I chose to enter through the narrow gate. I have found that the narrow way crosses mountains and valleys for which I have had to become spiritually fit

in order to walk. At times I fall off the side of the road, for it is indeed narrow, and have to pull myself, through God's grace, back onto the path. Trials and testings abound. Being honest, it is hard at times. But the mountain top experiences are incredible and make the valleys bearable for they form an inevitable part of mountain climbing, both in the natural and the spiritual.

There is however, another way in which these verses can be applied, that is, in regards to Christians. Many Christians take the path of 'easy Christianity', where they make a decision for Jesus yet continue to live their lives mainly in the world. In other words, become believers, but not disciples.

There are a number of references in the parables of Jesus. A few are - the Parable of the Sower, the Wise and Foolish Virgins and Parable of the Talents.

In each case, believers are split into categories, and the frightening part is, in each case, apparent believers who have not become disciples, are consigned to hell.

*Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. (Matthew 13:12b)*

*12 "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' (Matthew 25:12)*

*30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 25:30)*

**"Lord, may I be faithful to you in all that I do."**

## ***A Tree and Its Fruit***

***"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?"***

***Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.***

***Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.*** (Matthew 7:15-20)

### **EXPOSITION:**

The scriptural application is to the entire 5 fold ministry, not just prophets. In the illustration, the fruit bearing trees are of two types, those producing good, and those producing bad, fruit. What distinguishes the two? Matthew Henry comments, *If the doctrine be of God, it will tend to promote serious piety, humility, charity, holiness, and love, with other Christian graces; but if, on the contrary, the doctrines these prophets preach have a manifest tendency to make people proud, worldly, and contentious, to make them loose and careless in their conversations, unjust or uncharitable, factious or disturbers of the public peace; if it indulge carnal liberty, and take people off from governing themselves and their families by the strict rules of the narrow way, we may conclude, that 'this persuasion comes not of him that calleth us', (Gal. 5:8) Henry, Matthew, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997.*

Those who promote false doctrines will end up in hell.

## **TESTIMONY:**

For those involved in Christian 'ministry' (that is, all of us!) this passage is a timely reminder of the need to be so careful in what we speak, teach or preach.

While no one person has 100% of the truth, and inevitably, there will be one or two rotten or deformed fruit on our 'tree', as there is in the natural also. We are to be known by the good fruit in our life. In reality, by what we do rather than what we say, or say we do!

The problem in preaching and teaching is that we want to give a 'good' sermon or teaching. It is so tempting to 'spice it up' with words that stray from the truth. Maybe just a little to start off with, but more and more as time goes on.

For me personally, I have had to consider whether the 'revelations', the teachings you find in the 'David's Downloads' section of the PGIM weekly ezine are truly from God, or from my imagination.

Ironically, in a way, I have had an advantage - perhaps you may say 'a dangerous' advantage! For I have had little theological training. I spend many hours reading the Bible through and through from cover to cover. While I have a lousy memory when it comes to learning verses, or even knowing where specific verses are found, I do build up a good overall understanding of Biblical principles. When the Lord gives me a revelation or inspiration about a particular subject, I am then able to search out the detail, line upon line, scripture upon scripture, to produce the teachings. As a confirmation, I have always had the teachings checked out by people more

qualified and experienced than I in theological matters. For I have always been aware of wanting to be accurate scripturally in my writing.

Incidentally, knowledge and understanding are two quite different things. We can know a lot but understand little. I will never forget the time I conducted some meetings in Benin City in Nigeria. Some teachers from a local Bible Seminary came along, more than a little skeptical about this 'kiwi'. They mellowed. After the meetings, one of the men came up to me, a Doctor of Theology, and told me that he had studied the Bible for many years, had tremendous knowledge of it which he taught to others, yet this seminar was the first time he had truly gained a real understanding of what the Bible was really all about. This has been repeated elsewhere too. For **theology is based on knowledge, but understanding is grounded upon relationship.**

While it is good to have revelation, the most important truth, as shared by Jesus in this illustration of the tree and its fruit, is living life according to the example of Jesus. The 'fruit of the Spirit' are an obvious parallel.

*22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-3)*

Does my life exhibit these? You had better ask Jesus. Or my wife! Many times it does, other times it doesn't.

Summing up:

**Our best sermon is our life.**

## ***True and False Disciples***

***"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.***

***Many 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?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'***  
(Matthew 7:21-23)

### **EXPOSITION:**

*Note, A man may be a preacher, may have gifts for the ministry, and an external call to it, and perhaps some success in it, and yet be a wicked man; may help others to heaven, and yet come short himself.....This should be an awakening word to all Christians. If a preacher, one that cast out devils, and wrought miracles, be disowned of Christ for working iniquity; what will become of us, if we be found such? And if we be such, we shall certainly be found such. At God's bar, a profession of religion will not bear out any man in the practice and indulgence of sin; therefore let every one that names the name of Christ, depart from all iniquity. (Henry, Matthew, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997.)*

### **TESTIMONY:**

As we saw above, there are a good number of passages warning about imposters in ministry. Likewise, there are also many ordinary people in the church who proclaim they are followers of Jesus, but who really aren't. The tares will be separated from the wheat in due course.

This message is a warning. Be careful who you allow to influence your walk with Jesus. Do they truly 'practice what they preach?' If you don't know, it is safer not to follow their leading.

There is a problem with big ministries. Of necessity, the leaders are so far removed from the people, that it is just about impossible to check the leaders out. We see many leaders being exposed which comes with tremendous hurt and damage to the people, numbers of whom will never grace a church again, and may well throw away their faith.

Beware of the spiritual 'super salesman', who will likely look good, perhaps with a 'trophy wife', who likes to acquire the good things of the world rather than sacrifice the material in order to seek and find the spiritual. Most prosperity preachers fall into this category.

You see, anointing is given, and often remains, even when the receiver walks away from the Lord. And the temptations for anointed people to walk away are great, for satan is continually on your case! From personal experience, do not pray to receive anointing unless you are prepared to pay the price! I didn't pray to get it, but God still gave it, for I guess He knew me better than I know myself. Like everything in God, the greater the blessing, the greater the cost. We all want the blessings, but are we really prepared to price of receiving them?

But I digress.....

While anointing may be a sign of one to listen to, it may not be, also. Note that I didn't say, 'to follow'. For the only one we are to follow is Jesus! We may learn from a person, but we are only to follow Jesus. If our spiritual life



is built upon the leadership of a human being, we are not 'walking in The Way'. Our primary relationship must be with Jesus. We are to get to know Him through reading The Word for ourselves until, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Jesus becomes part of us, and we, part of Him. No man, no woman can be a 'Jesus substitute' in our lives. Yes, we need good mentors. But most of all, we need Jesus!

As leaders, only relationship with Jesus will stop us from going astray. As followers, may we follow Jesus, not a person.

**The church age has encouraged us to follow leadership, but in the coming kingdom age, in the final days, our attention and focus is to be upon Jesus. For only He who can turn the church into the pure white bride for whom He is to return.**

*7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) (Revelation 19:7-8)*

## ***The Wise and Foolish Builders***

***"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.***

***The 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.***

***But 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.***

***The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."***

*(Matthew 7:24-7)*

### **EXPOSITION:**

*The hearers of Christ's word are here divided into two sorts; some that hear, and do what they hear; others that hear and do not. Christ preached now to a mixed multitude, and he thus separates them, one from the other, as he will at the great day, when all nations shall be gathered before him. Henry, Matthew, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997.*

### **TESTIMONY:**

Jesus uses this graphic illustration as the conclusion of His great sermon, to define the difference in eternal destiny between 'hearers' and 'doers' of His Word.

We live in an area that is prone to earthquakes. In a 7.4 magnitude earthquake in 1931, here in Napier, 236 people were killed including one of my aunts, aged 6 at the time.

Some time ago, we took a lease on a building in our sister city of Hastings, also affected by the Napier earthquake of 1931, in order to open a new *Seekers* clothing shop. The local Council required the landlord to spend over \$300,000 on strengthening the building before allowing a change of use from storage to retail. The deal fell through.

Our prospective landlord would have loved to have us there, but he wasn't prepared to 'pay the price' necessary for our occupation.

How much that is like us! We love the idea of having Jesus in our life but we are not prepared to pay the price of changing our habits, our traditional way of doing things, be they good or bad. Strange as it may seem, many times we are happy being unhappy, as we are comfortable in it. For change is never comfortable!

The problem with foundations is that while they take much effort to build, in the final analysis, they are hidden from view! Yet, as Jesus illustrated, without the foundations of trials and testings, of submission and obedience to the Father, of developing the character of Jesus in our lives, living well, going to church and doing good deeds of the publicly seen walls and roof of the house of our life, will be futile. They are a showy waste of time when it comes to the storms of persecution, and to Judgment Day.

My life is not perfect! These words apply to me as much as to you. The Lord has changed, even transformed me, over the years of my Christian life, but

there are still areas remaining to be dealt with. Some I know about, others that He has not yet revealed to me. While I have considerable natural determination and willpower, I have discovered that there are very few changes that I have been able to make in my own strength. Particularly as one matures in Jesus, foundational aspects of our character are exposed and change required. For example, while it may be relatively easy to stop the negative behaviour of stealing, it is a lot more difficult to develop a positive, generous, giving personality. Such things take time.

I am slowly learning to stop trying to 'do it myself', but to go to the Holy Spirit with an open heart, mind and will, and give Him permission to change me. It does work, in His timing.

As Jesus himself said, prior to His death;

*13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. (John 16:13)*

**May we submit to our Lord, allowing Him to build solid foundation in our life that will withstand the storms and carry us through to eternal life with Him.**

## **The Crowds Reaction**

***When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.***

*(Matthew 7:28-29)*

### **EXPOSITION:**

*In the two last verses, we are told what impressions Christ's discourse made upon the auditory. It was an excellent sermon; and it is probable that he said more than is here recorded; and doubtless the delivery of it from the mouth of him, into whose lips grace was poured, did mightily set it off. Now. 1. They were astonished at this doctrine; it is to be feared that few of them were brought by it to follow him: but for the present, they were filled with wonder. Note, It is possible for people to admire good preaching, and yet to remain in ignorance and unbelief; to be astonished, and yet not sanctified. 2. The reason was because he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. The scribes pretended to as much authority as any teachers whatsoever, and were supported by all the external advantages that could be obtained, but their preaching was mean, and flat, and jejune: they spake as those who were not themselves masters of what they preached: the word did not come from them with any life or force; they delivered it as a school-boy says his lesson; but Christ delivered his discourse, as a judge gives his charge. He did indeed, *dominari in conscionibus*—deliver his discourses with a tone of authority; his lessons were law; his word a word of command. Christ, upon the mountain, showed more true authority, than the scribes in Moses's seat. Thus when Christ teaches by his Spirit in the soul, he teaches with authority. He says, *Let there be light, and there is light.* Henry, Matthew, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997.*

### **TESTIMONY:**

Jesus taught with authority. He practiced what He taught. Of course, He had an advantage as He knew the Word sdrawkcaB and forwards, as He was, and is, the Word!

We have likely all heard many, many sermons and teachings, a few great, some good, many ordinary and a few, downright bad.

I am sure that all who have been 'up the front' have asked themselves the question, "How do I give an inspired sermon/teaching that will help the people - every time!" This is a problem that seems insoluble! And it is! In fact our 'good days' are often very rare!

Yet the system is such that the preacher or teacher is expected to produce 'a gem' every week, every time they preach/teach. This is impossible - unless we are Jesus! And He has not yet returned!

The simple answer is that if we cannot change people to be continually inspired, then we need to change the system to one where we only speak when we truly do have inspiration from God.

You see, my friend, this principle is at the heart of the difference between 'kings' and 'kingdom'. Under the current church system the leader, the king, by whatever title he or she is known, is required to bring a kingly dissertation to his or her subjects, the congregation, and every 7 days. So we have seminaries preparing people in the art of giving a good sermon - a joke to start, 3 good points, repeated for emphasis, followed by a punchy conclusion. Okay, I may be exaggerating, but you get the picture!

I remember once, in my pre-Jesus days, being asked by a 'degree-d' minister friend what Scripture he could use to justify a point, a conclusion he wished to get across to his people. Don't know why He asked me! But the point is, no matter how good and relevant the point may have been, even I, in my pre-Jesus state, could see that it was the wrong way round of doing things. Placing the cart before the horse!

In the kingdom, where our leader is Jesus, unless we inspired to bring a message through the leading of the Holy Spirit, there is no pressure to bring one at all. Someone amongst those attending may have the message for today, or we need not have a message at all, as the Holy Spirit leads. Maybe today, we are to pray for and encourage one another, or simply worship, or even help a person in need in the community. Flexibility to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit is the key.

If the Holy Spirit truly inspires us in what to say, we will indeed have the authority of Jesus as we speak.

However, the greatest difference between Jesus and the Rabbis was that He practiced what He preached.

**Ultimately our lives are our greatest and most effective sermon. This is, and has always been, our greatest challenge.**

As we conclude our series on the 'Sermon on the Mount' I will leave you with both the example and the words of Jesus;

*12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. 13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I,*

*your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. **17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them** (John 13:12-17)*