

The only thing that matters is that you are reading God's word regularly. While that is still true with this schedule, the goal with this one is to get a better understanding of the entire story of the bible. There is no substitute for reading God's word. Keep reading! My website is at <http://graceofourlord.wordpress.com>. I encourage you to get the actual reading plan I am currently following. You can get it from the same place I do - at [this link](#). They have some great guidance for the reading plan there as well, and they have it all in both PDF and in Kindle format!

August 2012						
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(Week 31)	John 1	Luke 1	1 Luke 2	2 Matthew 3	3 Matthew 4	4
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August Week 1 (Week 32) Summary

Matthew 5, 6, 7, John 2, and John 3- Click the chapter below to go to the ESV Bible passage for that chapter and read or listen.

[Matthew 5](#) - Matthew 5 begins what we know as the Sermon on the Mount, and is certainly the best sermon of all time (it is, after all, quite literally the Word from God). Volumes have been written about chapter 5 alone, so this blog certainly cannot do an adequate job of commentary, but neither should it skip quickly through it. One can study it over and over and learn something new about being a part of His kingdom each time, and apply it to virtually any question about sin. [Matthew 4:23-25](#) tells us to some extent how much the Lord's fame had spread as he taught, proclaimed the gospel, and healed the afflicted - and we can get some idea of the "great crowds" that had begun following Him. Many of them were hoping for a much different king, and an

entirely different type of kingdom, than that which Jesus was proclaiming; but He well described that kingdom to Pilate in [John 18:36](#).

Verses 3-12 contain what we refer to as the Beatitudes. The translation of the word "blessed" in these verses is confusing to some, as it varies from "happy" to "fortunate." "Fortunate" is closer to the real meaning here (someone who is "mourning," for example, could hardly be described as "happy"), and it relates more to a state of being in a relationship with God that results from His approval. None of the qualities in these statements refer to a condition that people are born with, inherit, or come by naturally. Nor are they intended as prescriptions for behavior, some of which the unconverted world at large can simply adopt for the good of mankind.

These are traits of character and attitude that reflect the qualities that Christians must have. But they are not, as some have suggested, lofty goals - all of which no one person could possibly achieve. In each one, Jesus says "Blessed *are..*," indicating that there are people who have these qualities, and that we can ourselves be the people that he describes - that we as Christians, in fact, *must be* those people. Yet, we must understand that while having these qualities is what defines us as His people, our place in His kingdom is not something we earn by doing so. It is, in fact, our full understanding of that fact which enables us to have those qualities in the first place. It is the understanding that it is only by His grace - totally undeserved on our part - that we have salvation ([Ephesians 2:8](#)). But it is also our commitment to putting the needs, and even the importance of other people above that of our own that must shape our lives. All of these beatitudes illustrate these two facts, and point clearly to what Jesus Himself said are the two greatest commandments ([Matthew 22:35-40](#)).

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"

The "poor in spirit" refers to a condition of the heart much like the tax collector in the parable Jesus tells in [Luke 18:11-14](#). The latter part of verse 14 says it well - "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." It is likewise the same realization that Job came to when he at last got his audience with God in [Job 42:1-6](#) - that our we are nothing compared to our Creator.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted"

This refers to same sort of godly grief that comes from the remorse for our disobedience to God personally, as in [2 Corinthians 7:9-11](#), as well as mourning for the sins of others, as in [Psalm 119:136](#).

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth"

Unfortunately, most people translate meekness into weakness, but that is not what is meant here. This meekness comes from the conscious decision to control even one's own strength because of a redirected purpose - that of serving God, and of being genuinely concerned for the salvation of others, instead of serving ourselves. It is the antithesis of being overly concerned (and sometimes even obsessed) about personal advancement or correcting a perceived injustice to ourselves - to the detriment of others. They will "inherit the earth" because they put their trust

in God, rather than themselves, even if that means being gentle at times when they could use force instead ([Psalm 37:11-13](#)).

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied"

Few that will read this have ever known the sort of immense hunger that comes from being deprived of food for a very long time, but it is this sort of very deep hunger and thirst that is referred to here. When one becomes a Christian, he commits himself to being a new creature, putting his old pursuit of life behind him ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)), and then thirsts for knowledge and righteousness that comes from the right relationship with God ([Romans 12:2](#)). It is the kind of thirst spoken of in [Psalm 42:1-2](#).

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy"

The mercy referred to here is the sort of mercy Jesus taught in the parable of the unforgiving servant ([Matthew 18:23-35](#)), as well as the mercy that equates to compassion, as in the parable of the good Samaritan ([Luke 10:25-37](#)).

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"

This purity in heart is what Jesus speaks of in [Matthew 15:18-20](#), and is the sort of sincere devotion to striving for good that we are encouraged to emulate in [Philippians 4:8](#).

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God"

This does not refer to those who settle disputes or conflicts with others, though that sort of peace certainly may be a bi-product of it. But the word used for peace, *shalom*, had a much more meaningful usage. Here it relates not just to striving to be without conflict, but a deep and compassionate desire to instill well-being in one's self, and especially in others, by having a right relationship with God ([Colossians 3:12-15](#)) that encourages others to do the same. We have peace with God through Jesus ([Romans 5:1](#)), and it is in Him through which we are all sons of God ([Galatians 3:26](#)).

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"

Those who serve the Lord have been hated by others for all time. [Genesis 3:15](#) tells us that it will be that way as the Lord put enmity (a condition of hostility and animosity) between the devil's offspring and us. That enmity was there throughout the Old Testament just as with Cain and Abel. It was there at the time of Jesus, as Herod and others later even sought to kill the Son of God; and that hostility non-believers have for God and His people is still in evidence today. Jesus named them for who they serve in [John 8:44](#); and Paul explains in [Romans 8:7](#) that those who are hostile to God *cannot* submit to His law. This is at the root of their animosity toward God's people.

Verses 13-16 are referred to as the Similitudes, comparing Christians to salt and light. The salt they were familiar with would not have come from the round box with a metal spout, but probably from the Dead Sea, containing much impurity that over time would have the salt leached out. Jesus says that Christians are the salt of the earth. One way that we can lose our effectiveness (the savor) as such is by allowing our worship, and even the preaching of the Gospel itself, to become watered down by compromising in it so that we may please men, rather than remaining true to God's commands. We remain the light of the world by staying true to His commands and letting the world see the results of the beatitudes in our lives. Verse 20 would be a fairly shocking statement, as the Pharisees certainly would have considered themselves to be the most righteous of all.

Verses 21-30 tell us that although murder and adultery both are certainly wrong, sin is a problem of the heart (going back to the 6th beatitude) as well. When we allow anger and lust to take it over, we have sinned. In verses 29-30, tearing an eye out or cutting a hand off are not literal suggestions (one could still lust with one eye, after all). The verses illustrate how important it is to remove ourselves completely from anything that makes us prone to fall away from the Lord.

Verses 31-32 make it clear that God takes the marriage relationship very seriously; and as [Matthew 19:3-9](#) states, God intended from the beginning for that relationship to be between one man and one woman forever. Unfortunately, many people have considered the entire lesson of verses 33-37 to be that one should not take an oath, even in a judicial circumstance. While a Christian should consider that carefully in his heart, that does not seem to be the point that Jesus was making. Look further - in [Matthew 23:16-22](#) - and consider that the Pharisees distinguished one oath from another, in order to excuse being deceptive - as if a lie would actually not be a lie if that by which you swear was not counted as binding. If people have to constantly wonder whether or not something one says may be true, one is hardly demonstrating that he hungers and thirsts after righteousness.

One should not take verses 38-42 to mean that there is never an appropriate time to take action or defend against evil. Once again, a proper reading of the rest of the New Testament will demonstrate that such is not the case. But the Pharisees had corrupted the Old Testament law to extend the right of personal revenge to new heights. Instead, Jesus teaches (and Paul states it well in [Romans 12:17-21](#)) that we should not resist evil with evil, but we rather overcome evil with good.

This magnificent chapter concludes in verses 43-48 with the command that we should love even our enemies, and even pray for those who persecute us. Apart from the fact that it is the right thing to do, and that it is commanded by God, this just makes good sense when we think about it. If we truly pray for the salvation of those who do wrong to us, we are praying for their hearts and lives to become blessed as in the beatitudes of this chapter. If that prayer is granted, how could that person continue to do us evil!

[Matthew 6](#) - Verses 1-8 are the Lord's admonitions to us not to try to parade our righteousness before others, and likewise not to pray with an empty heart. When we do good works, such as helping those who are in need, to attract the attention, admiration, or approval of others, it taints the very act we are doing by putting the focus on ourselves. All good instead should be to the

glory of God, living by His commandments and doing good because of the reign of the Lord in our hearts and lives. The "empty phrases" of verse 7 are translated as "vain repetitions" in some versions, causing some to be critical of those praying fervently with over-used and repetitious phrases. But such is not what Jesus was speaking about (just think of his own heart-felt prayers at Gethsemane in [Mark 14:39](#)), but many so-called pious pagans of the day would beseech their "gods" with endless empty chatter. Prayer to the Lord cannot be centered from the heart if the mind is not to be used in earnest.

Most people know verses 9-13 as the "Lord's prayer." But that designation is ours and is unfortunate in some ways, as there is a tendency to use it in the very way that Jesus warned against in the previous verses! It is an example and a model for our own prayers from our hearts - it was meant to teach us how to pray - with reverence and honor to the Lord, before presenting our petitions. The "kingdom" was to come in the power of the God's son which would be fulfilled through the crucifixion and resurrection ([Mark 9:1](#) and [Romans 1:4](#)).

The references to fasting in verses 16-18 are not a command for us to fast, though there is nothing wrong with doing so. The only time that the Old Testament Law required fasting was for the Day of Atonement ([Leviticus 16:29-31](#)), but many other days had been added by the people themselves, especially after the events of the destruction of Jerusalem and Babylonian captivity. And by now, the Pharisees had made it a weekly activity. The problem came in the fact that people were purposely making themselves look more haggard than they were, so as to draw attention to themselves for their piety.

Verses 19-21 speak to the heart as well. If we place the most value on the things of this world, we do so at the expense of our spiritual well-being. The treasures we store in heaven are our own salvation and is all that will truly last. The "eye" of verses 22-23 is similar to the heart in Jewish literature. If the eye is healthy, the light that fills the heart comes from devotion to the Lord.

Verses 25-34 do not mean God's people have no need to work for anything (see [2 Thessalonians 3:10](#)). But if we put our service to the Lord above all else, that means that we will of necessity be doing all that we should be doing that is right for ourselves as well. If God takes care of the lowliest of His creation, why should we be worried for our own care? If we had to spend an inordinate amount of time on that kind of worry, we would have less time to devote to what is important - our salvation and that of others. Again, it is what we value most that determines where our heart lays.

[Matthew 7](#) - Verse 1 is one of the few verses that many people who know little else about the Bible are familiar with; and it is wrongly used both as self-justification and to rebuke criticism of wrong-doing. The verse denounces compassion-less condemnation and hypocritical judgment of others - not any judgment at all. In fact, verse 6 requires judgment on our part, and if we could not judge at all, how could we ever determine what was right or wrong. The problem also comes into play when people want to put us on the spot, asking if we believe one person or even a group of people will go to heaven. Thank the Lord that such judgment is not our responsibility! It sometimes takes tremendous courage to speak up to someone who is doing wrong. You run the risk of hurting their feelings or more likely, making them angry - and even

alienating yourself from people you care about. But if you believe that someone is living in a way in which they risk losing their soul and you say nothing, is that not terribly wrong of you?

Verse 6 simply means that there comes a time when, try as we might, we must realize that we are not going to be able to persuade some people to serve the Lord, and we must move on. Verses 7-11 do not make God the vending machine of prayer that grants every wish if we just ask for something. Not all things we wish for are best for us or for His purposes.

Certainly God answers prayers, and many times, that answer from our perspective is "yes," - other times we must be patient and see that His way is better for all in the long-term scheme. But the good gifts spoken of here are more spiritual in nature, as Jesus is making the point that the kingdom is open to all, and not just a select few.

The Golden Rule of verse 12 should come naturally to those who love the Lord with all their heart, and their neighbor as themselves. Verses 13-14 mean that though the way to heaven can be difficult with all of the temptation around us, the other way - the easy way - leads to destruction. Verses 15-20 are great advice for knowing who the many false prophets are - just like a good tree or a bad tree, you will know by their fruits. What is the result of their influence on others? This will always show the truth of the matter.

Verses 21-23 do not refer to people who are completely lacking in religious fervor. The key point is the latter part of verse 21 "the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." There are many who do great works and genuinely consider themselves to be righteous, but have never fully submitted to the Lord's authority. Partial obedience, or subverting God's commands to fit man's own desires has never been good enough, and never will be - it is still disobedience (see [James 2:8-11](#)). Note that those referred to in those verses listed the works that they had done, missing the point entirely concerning where salvation comes from. It comes from the Lord's grace, and that grace does not negate the requirement for full obedience!

Most everyone who went to Bible class as a child knows something of the story of the wise man who built his house on the rock, and the foolish man who built on the sand. As Jesus concludes this powerful sermon, He uses this analogy to demonstrate that all of things that He is teaching us in this sermon constitute the foundation for the "house" that we are building with our lives. By using all of these principles, we are building on a solid foundation (rock). Ignoring some of them, we will still get the house built, and it may appear to be fine. But when the storms of life come, the lack of a solid foundation may well result in disaster - and the final outcome (the eternal one) will certainly be a great fall.

[John 2](#) – John 2:11 confirms that the event of the wedding at Cana is where Jesus performed His first miracle. Some make reference to this as an argument for social drinking, but it would be safe to say that the Lord would not be providing a means for people to become drunk with wine. For Jesus to have done so would have been a sin ([Habakkuk 2:15](#)); and the point of this scripture is found in examining the miracle (or sign, as John refers to it) itself. There were six stone jars, each holding 20-30 gallons. Note that verse 7 says that He had the servants fill the

jars to the brim with water - nothing could have been poured into them afterward, and Jesus never touched them. Running out of wine at a wedding feast would be particularly awkward.

Addressing His mother as "Woman" in verse 4 would seem disrespectful to people today, but such was not the case in the language of the day. It was a term of respectful distance. Note that the anger is righteous anger, as Jesus drives out the merchants and money changers. The temple area spoken of here would be the surrounding area of the temple itself that would be used for worship as well by worshiping Gentiles. So these traders would be disrupting that worship. In verse 18, the Jews present questioned Jesus as to what His authority for doing this was. He answered "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Of course, they did not understand that He was talking about His own body - not the temple He had just cleansed. But verse 22 confirms that His disciples would remember after the crucifixion.

[John 3](#) - Nicodemus was a Pharisee. Verse one says that he was a "ruler of the Jews," which would make him a member of the Sanhedrin - the Jewish governing council. In fact, one of the other two places he is mentioned is in [John 7:50](#), as there is division among them concerning arresting Jesus. Nicodemus states his belief that Jesus is sent from God because of the signs that he did, confirming that Jesus did many more miracles than were written in the gospel, as John states in [John 20:30-31](#). Nicodemus seems to be trying to understand what Jesus means by being born again in a physical manner. But Jesus is speaking of being re-born by the Spirit by way of baptism ([Romans 6:3-4](#), [Colossians 2:12-13](#)). In verse 14, Jesus refers to Moses lifting up the Bronze Serpent in [Numbers 21:5-9](#) to save the people when they had spoken against God; and gives Nicodemus a preview of His crucifixion, which likely he would also not understand - yet. He will repeat this reference to being lifted up in [John 8:28](#) and [John 12:32-33](#).

Verse 16 is one of the most famous of the New Testament, and most Bibles that put the words of Jesus in red assign verses 16-21 as His words. But many scholars believe that these verses are actually John's inspired words, and the fact that he speaks of God having given His son in the past tense seems to bear that out. In any case, these verses are joined with verse 15 in such a way that together they well represent the message of the gospel concerning salvation. The phrase "God so loved the world" followed by the other references to the world are often overlooked in their significance - not only for salvation being open to all, but the declaration of God's love for all the world, not just the people of Israel.