



Study Guide: Matthew – Chapter 5

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This study guide provides an educational overview of Matthew Chapter 5 using a verse-by-verse structure, theological context, and application-oriented insights grounded in Scripture.

Introduction

Matthew chapter 5 marks the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, one of the most significant discourses in the New Testament. This chapter sets the tone for the ethical and spiritual teachings that follow, presenting a radical vision of the Kingdom of Heaven. As the opening segment of the sermon, it introduces the Beatitudes, which describe the character and blessings of those who belong to God's kingdom. Readers should watch for how Jesus reinterprets Old Testament law and righteousness, offering a deeper, heart-centered obedience rather than mere external compliance.

Context

Matthew 5 is situated within the broader narrative of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee. The immediate literary context is the transition from Jesus' baptism and initial teachings to a formal presentation of His ethical instructions. The setting is a mountainside, evoking Old Testament imagery of Moses receiving the law on Mount Sinai, which frames Jesus as a new lawgiver. The key speaker is Jesus Himself, addressing His disciples and the gathered crowd. Historically, this teaching emerges in a Jewish context deeply rooted in the Mosaic covenant, yet Jesus introduces a covenant renewal that emphasizes internal transformation and fulfillment of the law's true intent.

Outline

The chapter opens with the Beatitudes, outlining the blessedness of those who embody kingdom values. This is followed by the metaphor of believers as salt and light, illustrating their role in the world. The main body of the chapter then focuses on Jesus' authoritative teaching on the law, where He contrasts traditional interpretations with His deeper, heart-focused demands. This section includes six antitheses, each beginning with "You have heard that it was said," and followed by "But I say to you," highlighting the fulfillment and intensification of the law. The chapter concludes with exhortations to genuine



righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, emphasizing sincerity in religious practice.

Verse-by-Verse Study

Verses 1–12: The Beatitudes present a series of blessings pronounced on those who exhibit humility, mercy, purity, and a hunger for righteousness. Each Beatitude reveals a paradoxical blessing that inverts worldly values, promising future reward and comfort for present suffering.

Verses 13–16: Jesus calls His followers the “salt of the earth” and “light of the world,” metaphors that emphasize their influence and responsibility to preserve goodness and illuminate truth in society.

Verses 17–20: Jesus clarifies His relationship to the law, affirming that He has not come to abolish it but to fulfill it. He warns that righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees to enter the kingdom, setting a high standard for His disciples.

Verses 21–26: Jesus addresses the commandment against murder, expanding it to include anger and insult, thereby exposing the heart’s condition as the true measure of righteousness and calling for reconciliation.

Verses 27–30: The teaching on adultery is intensified to include lustful thoughts, highlighting the importance of internal purity and the radical measures necessary to avoid sin.

Verses 31–32: Jesus teaches on divorce, emphasizing the sanctity of marriage and warning against casual dismissal of marital vows.

Verses 33–37: The instruction on oaths calls for straightforward honesty, rejecting the need for elaborate vows and encouraging simple, truthful speech.

Verses 38–42: Jesus introduces a new ethic of non-retaliation and generosity, urging His followers to respond to evil with grace, turning the other cheek and going the extra mile.

Verses 43–48: The chapter closes with a command to love enemies and pray for persecutors, reflecting God’s perfect love and calling believers to transcend common human inclinations toward retaliation and partiality.

Key Themes



One key theme is the nature of true blessedness, which is rooted in dependence on God and manifests in humility, mercy, and purity. Another theme is the fulfillment and deepening of the law, where Jesus exposes the insufficiency of external obedience and calls for transformation of the heart. The chapter also emphasizes the identity and mission of believers as salt and light, tasked with influencing the world for God's kingdom. Finally, the radical ethic of love and non-retaliation challenges conventional justice, reflecting the perfect love of God and inviting believers into a higher standard of righteousness.

Cross-References

The Beatitudes echo Old Testament promises such as those found in Isaiah 61, which speak of comfort for the brokenhearted and liberation for captives, clarifying the kingdom's upside-down values. Jesus' teaching on the law relates closely to Deuteronomy 5 and Leviticus 19, where the commandments originate, but His interpretation reveals the heart's intent beyond the letter. The call to be salt and light parallels the role of Israel as a light to the nations in Isaiah 42. The ethic of loving enemies connects with Leviticus 19:18's command to love neighbors, but Jesus extends it further, embodying God's perfect love described in 1 John 4. These cross-references illuminate the continuity and fulfillment of Scripture in Jesus' teaching.

Application

Modern discipleship requires embracing the Beatitudes as a framework for character formation, cultivating humility, mercy, and purity in daily life. Believers are called to examine their hearts, moving beyond legalistic observance to genuine righteousness that reflects God's holiness. The metaphors of salt and light challenge Christians to actively engage their communities, influencing culture with grace and truth. The radical commands to love enemies and practice non-retaliation invite a countercultural lifestyle marked by forgiveness and generosity, reflecting the heart of Christ. These teachings encourage ongoing transformation and reliance on the Holy Spirit to live out the kingdom ethic authentically.

Summary

Matthew 5 inaugurates Jesus' Sermon on the Mount by presenting the character of the kingdom through the Beatitudes, establishing the identity and mission of His followers as salt and light. The chapter deepens the understanding of the law, calling for a righteousness that surpasses external compliance and addresses the heart's motives.



Jesus' teachings challenge His disciples to embody a radical ethic of love, forgiveness, and integrity that reflects God's perfect holiness. This chapter sets the foundation for the transformative demands of discipleship and the nature of life in God's kingdom.