

BEST. SERMON. EVER.



THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT MATTHEW 5-7

Matthew 5:21-48

Kingdom Living

1.31.20

Appearances can be deceiving

Have you ever bitten into an apple that looked good but turned out to be rotten? Everyone gets upset when the appearance of something is proved wrong by what is inside.

You know what I am talking about; you have experienced it with people.

Sometimes this happens on a first date. First impressions can be misleading. Eventually, you get the sixth date and realize this isn't the person you thought they were.

Sometimes this happens when you interviewing to hire a new position. The person appears great but a few months into the job you realize they are lazy, rude, and don't really work well with a team.

We know the destructive, shocking nature of those who appear to be one thing on the outside but are something completely different on the inside. I think of Matt Lauer, Bill Cosby or Bernie Madoff.

There is a pastor of a mega-church in New York City. He was very respected as a pastor. Celebrities attended his church and on the outside he looked to be very successful. In November, he was fired for having an affair with a fashion designer in New York City.

Today, Jesus is going to tell us something we all know and want to be true. Jesus is going to say, **In the Kingdom, the heart matters.**

Jesus is going to address six external issues by telling his disciples to look at what is going on inside of them. Here are the six issues Jesus will address:

- Anger
- Adultery
- Divorce
- Oaths
- Retribution
- Enemies

Jesus is saying, appearances can be deceiving. All of these things can appear to be dealt with on the outside, but they can be never really dealt with on the inside.

A Sermon Illustration from Jesus

Let's begin by looking at a different sermon given by Jesus. There are five sermons in the book of Matthew. In chapter 23, Jesus cautions the scribes and Pharisees. Here is what Jesus says in verses 25-26:



GRANT AVENUE
BAPTIST CHURCH

²⁵ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶ You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

I imagine Jesus holding up his coffee cup and pointing out the stupidity of only washing the outside of the cup and claiming it was clean. The inside is still dirty! Jesus actually says, wash the inside and in the process the outside will become clean.

Here is what Jesus is doing. **Jesus moves us from external conformity to internal transformation.** It's possible this is the move God wants to make in your life today. He wants to take you from one who does the right things to one who is truly transformed in the heart.

Maybe you have been living with this weight of hypocrisy. Maybe your cup looks pretty good on the outside, but you know the inside is dirty. Maybe you have come to the realization that the Kingdom of Heaven has more to offer and you want it.

How does one change?

Here is the question: How do we clean the inside? How do we experience internal transformation?

Now, I'm going to begin by making the assumption that you have already received the gift of salvation by faith. When you enter into a relationship with Jesus you are given a new heart. But we also know that our sin nature doesn't go away. We live in the already saved but not yet completely sanctified space.

Faith in Jesus' death and resurrection results in justification. That's a fancy theological term meaning you are right with God. **Because you believe in Jesus death and resurrection, you are justified by his death.**

Faith in God also initiates sanctification – a changing of who I am. I am becoming more like Jesus. Faith in God initiates a transformation. But how do we transform? How does God move us from who were to what we are becoming?

Let me give you two opposite ends of the spectrum.

First, some fall into the exhausting belief that you just have to try harder. So you set boundaries, issue new rules, have new commitments - but it usually just results in the same cycle. I fail, I commit to do better, I fail, I find ask for accountability, I fail, I promise it's the last time, I fail, I read a book, I fail.

I think of what Paul said, "He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it." God is going to do the work, not you!

Behavior modification without heart transformation never works. Simply trying harder will not result in heart transformation.

The other end of the spectrum is an attitude of "Jesus will do the work, I don't need to do anything." His person might read their Bible and pray and just wait for God to change them.

This sounds holy. But I think of the woman caught in adultery. She is brought before Jesus and the Pharisees are ready to stone her. Jesus says, "the one who has never sinned can throw the first stone."

It's silent, except for the stones falling from the hands of the defeated Pharisees. Jesus looks at the woman and says he doesn't condemn her. She is justified! Then he says, "Go and sin no more." He instructs her to do something.

So how do we change? We need to find ground somewhere in the middle.

Simply put: **God changes my heart as I take decisive action.**

Let me show you what I mean by looking at the six external issues that Jesus address. In all of them he calls his disciples to decisive action – all the while recognizing that we need the Spirit of God to work in our hearts.

Murder (vs. 21-24)

Jesus explains the command: Murder is not just an external act of violence but the violent intent of the heart. *You can wash the outside (don't murder) but what really needs to be dealt with is the anger inside of you.* How does one become a person who doesn't get angry?

Jesus lays out a progression. In your heart there is anger. It's a secret. No one knows. You are jealous and become angry. Your pride has been attacked, so you become angry. Someone treated you poorly, so you get angry.

You are hungry and tired, so you are angry.

Jesus is going to show you how this inner issue is going to expose its self on the outside.

He then says that the one who insults is liable to judgement. The NIV says anyone who says "raca" is liable to judgement. The Greek word was a derogatory term that literally meant "empty-headed fool." It is a form of name-calling. In your anger you are starting to diminish people.

We can do this in an active way by insulting someone to their face. You can also do this passively: you intentionally leave them out; you speak poorly of them behind their back.

This it escalates to saying, "You fool." It's a result of "a fixated hatred of someone." The anger is now on the outside, it's ready to explode. The anger is ready to murder.

Jesus is demonstrating he progression from the heart to the hands. But it's more that. Anger is like murder too. Anger is thinking of people as anything less than the image of God. This is exactly what murder is.

Jesus needs to transform your heart. He needs to take your heart of anger and transform it into a heart of love. This is something that really only happens by the work of God in your life.

But notice, he calls you to decisive action. Along with the working of God in your heart, there is instruction he is giving to you.

Specifically, be a person who reconciles. Jesus is serious about anger and he is serious about you being a person of reconciliation.

Jesus says, "Press pause on your worship." This is how serious anger is - if you know someone else is angry with you, go help them stop being angry, because they are destroying themselves.

You can't change your heart, but you can create space for the Spirit to work. Take decisive action to reconcile with others.

Adultery (vs. 27-30)

Once again, Jesus moves from the external issue (adultery) to the internal issue (lust). I preached a whole message back in October on these verses and really defined lust. You can go back and listen to it if you want.

Jesus is revealing to the people, you can take care of the external issue (never have sex outside of marriage), but internally you have sex outside of marriage with plenty of people (in your thoughts, viewing pornography, etc.)

Heart transformation needs to take place. Jesus needs to move you from lust to love. There is a lot that needs to change in your heart.

Too many college students are not in love with their boyfriend or girlfriend, they are in lust. Too many grown adults lust after an image on the other side of the screen. We need to pray and ask God to change our hearts to love, not lust.

Jesus calls his disciples to decisive action again: **Be a person who makes room for purity.**

Verse 29-30 are verses of hyperbole. The point is "go to extreme measures to set yourself up for righteous-

ness.”

There are so many practical things we could do. It might feel like cutting off your hand to only use your computer in a common place – but be decisive in your decision making.

Struggle with your thought life? Paul says, “take every thought captive”. It might feel extreme to examine all of your thoughts but will make room for purity.

Divorce (vs. 31-32)

Let's go back in time. In Moses' day divorce was common; all a man had to do was announce to his wife, “I divorce you,” and he was divorced. But there wasn't really any legal record of it. The woman would feel the brunt of this. What if the man came back and wanted her back? She faced an uphill battle in trying to get remarried.

Deuteronomy 24:1-3 shows that Moses made a way for divorce to happen. You needed to obtain a certificate of divorce. This was to protect the wife. It wasn't the desire of God for divorce to happen, but he made a way to allow the woman to still remarry and be taken care of.

Jesus transforms the common understanding of the law. In essence what Jesus is saying is, “Just because you got a paper that says you are divorced, doesn't make it legit.”

Remember, in the Kingdom the heart matters. Jesus is saying the issue at play in your heart is unfaithfulness. You give up when it's hard. You don't take your vows seriously.

We need Jesus to transform our hearts from unfaithfulness to love.

I would also argue, although it's not explicit in the text, that there is a call to decisive action: **Be a person who commits.**

Almost every wedding I have performed I remind the couple: A wedding isn't about love, it's about commitment. A wedding is about choosing to love, even when it is hard.

Oaths (vs. 33-37)

The acceptable standard of the day was to never break an oath. The Pharisees taught that swearing on God or Jerusalem (God's holy city) or even yourself was binding.

A loophole had been created in truth-telling. If you didn't make an oath, then you don't necessarily need to tell the truth. Manipulation, truth-twisting – it's all fair game.

Jesus says, “Kingdom people are people of their word.” In fact, in the Kingdom, there is no need to say, “I promise”. Because you are a person of integrity, there is no reason for someone not to trust you. Let your yes be yes, and your no be no.

Moving your heart from one of manipulation and lies to love is an act of God. But he does call us to decisive action: **Be a person who lives truthfully.**

Practically speaking, this means keeping your commitments. It means you guard your character by keeping your word. We want to be known as a church of people who keep their word. People who are different because when we say it, we mean it.

Retaliation (vs. 38-42)

What is being quoted is actually civil law, not moral or personal law. God had instituted laws for the nation of Israel. He said, “Eye for an eye,” which basically meant, “You steal \$20 worth of grain – you owe \$20.”

The Pharisees had allowed this to become a personal law. You can get your own revenge, just put a limit on it.

In the Kingdom, we don't retaliate. Now to be clear, good government gets justice for its people. But look at the examples that Jesus gives:

- Don't defend your pride (vs. 39)
If you are slapped, or more accurately, back-handed slapped – your honor is insulted. Jesus says, give up our right to defend yourself.
- Don't resist humiliation (vs. 41)
Under Roman occupation of Israel, a soldier by law could force an Israelite to go 1000 paces (translated into English as a mile) with the soldier's equipment. This was deeply resented and humiliating for the Jewish people. Jesus says, "Don't just walk what the law requires, lay down your rights and go 2000 paces."

God is moving our hearts from an internal state of retaliation to one of love. Jesus is showing the demand of the Old Testament law – it's love!

Along the way, Jesus calls us to decisive action: **Be a person who serves others sacrificially.**

We go the extra mile to serve. We don't seek retaliation but give more.

Enemies (vs. 43-48)

This is where things actually go off the rails: Nowhere in your Bible does it say, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemies." The Pharisees and scribes had actually made that up.

They read their Old Testament and said, "Obviously we are told to love our neighbor, but that can't apply to all people. You can hate your enemies."

The heart transformation of the disciple at its core is moving us from hate to love.

Notice this: **The decisive action of the disciple is to be a person who prays for their enemies.**

We just don't see a lot of this today. Who actually prays for their enemies? This act opens the door for the spirit of God to work in our hearts.

Conclusion

In the Kingdom, **God changes my heart as I take decisive action.**

I don't know that I fully understand this. So invite you into a new kind of living. Jesus isn't inviting you to be nice but to be made new. He makes us new and at the same time call us to decisive action!

Small Group Discussion Guide

Opening questions (pick one or two to answer as a group)

1. Appearances can be deceiving. Share a time you were deceived by the appearance of something or someone.
2. How would you define a "Christian Hypocrite"? Is it ever possible not to be hypocrite?
3. Play two truths and a lie. Its easy to fool people into believing something. Use this game to transition into your discussion on appearances being deceiving.

Six Points of Decisive Action

1. Be a person who reconciles.
2. Be a person who makes room for purity.
3. Be a person who commits.
4. Be a person who lives truthfully.
5. Be a person who serves sacrificially.
6. Be a person who prays for their enemies.

Discussion Questions

Read the Passage together (or just parts of the passage). Ask someone to recap the sermon or share what stood out to them the most.

1. The heart behind our actions matters. How does the heart of a person change? Is it through human effort or Holy Spirit reliance?
2. Look at the six external issues. Share how you might be able to live this out without having their heart changed.
3. Have you ever encountered someone who displayed outer righteousness but over time their heart was revealed? What could you learn about your own hear from them?
4. Choose one or two of the issues to deal with specifically.
 - A. In what ways is it easy to put on an appearance of righteousness?
 - B. How does the decisive action called for by Jesus open your heart to change caused by the Holy Spirit?
 - C. What does the decisive action practically look like for you?
5. Pastor Bryan gave six points of decisive action—which of these six should you focus on this week?

