

# **The Sermon on the Mount**

## **Learning to Follow Jesus**

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“Whatever requires contrivance and fuss and involves much commotion and, as it were, turns our whole life into one long provision for the flesh (Rom. 13: 14), should be avoided by Christians.”

– St. Basil the Great

### **Instruction in Authentic Righteousness (Matt. 6:19-7:12)**

#### **Seek ye first the Kingdom of God**

Jesus frequently contrasts two kinds of reward:

- An earthly reward (present)
- The Kingdom of heaven (future; already-but-not-yet)

From *The Screwtape Letters* (C. S. Lewis): “The humans live in time but our Enemy destines them to eternity. He therefore, I believe, wants them to attend chiefly to two things, to eternity itself, and to that point of time which they call the Present ... Our business is to get them away from the eternal, and from the Present. With this in view, we sometimes tempt a human (say a widow or a scholar) to live in the Past. But this is of limited value, for they have some real knowledge of the past and it has a determinate nature and, to that extent, resembles eternity. It is far better to make them live in the Future. Biological necessity makes all their passions point in that direction already, so that thought about the Future inflames hope and fear. Also, it is unknown to them, so that in making them think about it, we make them think of unrealities [...] [W]e want a man hag-ridden by the Future.”

#### **Serving Two Masters**

“No one can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” (Matt. 6:24, NRSVue)

## **Anxiety about the Future**

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” (Matt. 6:25)

“In the subsistence economy of first century Palestine, people worried about food and clothing. In affluent economies of the 21st century, people worry about health. Contemporary medicine has become a locus for humankind’s perennial anxiety that God will not take care of us, that God is not to be trusted. The power of that anxiety is measured in how much trouble we will go through and how much money we will spend to only very modestly, if at all, decrease our risk of future injury, illness, and death.” – Farr Curlin, “‘Sufficient for the day is its own trouble’: Medicalizing Risk and the Way of Jesus”

## **Judge Not?**

“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For the judgment you give will be the judgment you get, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.” (Matt. 7:1-2)

Are we seeking an earthly reward or a heavenly reward? Are we seeking earthly vengeance or heavenly vengeance?

- See Matt. 6:1-6
- See Luke’s beatitudes (blessings and woes; Lk. 6:20-26)

## **Ask, and it will be given to you (6:7-11)**

God knows what we need before we ask (see Matt. 6:7-8)

Why do the gentiles (“pagans”) heap up empty phrases? How does their view of God differ from the way Jesus is calling us to approach God the Father?