

**Monday      Week 32      Teaching of Jesus**

Bible Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

Q 125 What did Jesus teach his disciples?

A. He taught them how to live as part of the kingdom of heaven.

A man stood at the side of the road with traffic whizzing by him. After a little while, he put up his hand. Cars and trucks suddenly slowed down and stopped. Why did they stop? The man was wearing a uniform. He was a policeman. Policemen wear uniforms so that people know who they are. A man wearing that uniform represents the law. When you see a policeman, you know what he represents by his uniform.

Those who are part of the kingdom of God are not required to wear a uniform. In his teaching, Jesus did not tell people to wear certain clothes that said they were Christians. Instead, he taught that if you are part of the kingdom of heaven, you would have a godly spirit. The Beatitudes that Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount show us how to live for God. You can't tell a person is a Christian just by looking at them. But if you are around him for a while and watch how he lives, you should be able to tell if he is a Christian. A Christian represents Jesus by a righteous life.

Thinking Deeper

Professional baseball players must wear a uniform to play on the team. Each team uniform has a different color or design, but no uniform can be too baggy, or have pants hooked onto the player's shoes. (These are in the contract negotiations of the 2008 baseball season.) There are reasons for uniforms. A baggy uniform could get in the way of the player as he tries to run. Or a baggy uniform gives the batter an advantage. It can be puffed out while the player is batting, making it easier to be touched by a pitch thus sending him to first base. If a player does not wear a uniform which conforms to Major League rules, he cannot play the game.

Are you living according to Kingdom guidelines? Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God includes those who live according to God's precepts. In what has been called "the greatest sermon ever preached," Jesus set out the parameters of kingdom living. It is significant that Jesus didn't approach kingdom living as something that we "ought" to do, but rather as a description of how people live who are part of the kingdom. S.D. Herron used to say that any man from the south sitting on his porch and chewing Brown Mule tobacco could tell you how you ought to live. That doesn't make that man a Christian. Basically, Jesus' sermon stated that if you are in the kingdom, this is how you live. If you are not living this way, you are not in the kingdom. It's as straightforward as that.

## Tuesday      Week 32      Teaching of Jesus

Bible Reading: Matt. 5:13-16

Q 126 How does a follower of Jesus change the world?

A. They are like salt and light.

Baby food in jars comes in a lot of flavors. One flavor is squash. The squash is cooked and blended so that it is very smooth. Salt is added, along with sugar, and maybe a little butter. It tastes pretty good. One family decided to make their own squash for the baby. They cooked the squash and blended it so it was very smooth. Then they gave the baby a bite. She made a very bad face and spit out the squash. What was the matter? They didn't add any flavoring; no sugar, no salt, and no butter. Actually, very few adults would have wanted to eat that squash without any flavor. Food without flavoring is often not very good.

Jesus said that Christians are the salt of the earth. We are in the world to make things better. We are here to help when people are hurting. We are here to give to people who are in need. When there is a chance, Christians are to be a blessing. If Christians are not a blessing, what good is it to have Christians? Without salt, food doesn't taste good. Without Christians being a blessing, the world is a pretty sad place. Jesus said, "Ye are the salt of the earth."

### Thinking Deeper

John R. W. Stott has argued that just as salt has a preservative influence when it is applied to what normally degenerates, so Christianity in the world helps to preserve it from rotting. Similarly, kingdom living in the world shows up in dark places, just as a candle illuminates what hides under the cover of darkness. Jesus' teaching on salt and light presupposes a righteous life as the norm for Christian influence.

The normal Christian life is a holy life. The normal Christian ethic is righteousness. The normal Christian morality is truthfulness, virtue and purity. The normal Christian financial dealing is honesty. The normal Christian relationship is marked by kindness and forgiveness.

What happens when those who claim the name of Christ are unholy, impure, dishonest, unforgiving and unkind? What happens when lasciviousness, fornication, unpaid bills, judging of others and a harsh spirit are a significant part of those who are supposed to be examples of kingdom living? They will be rightly condemned as hypocrites. Men will cast them out and trample them underfoot. The world will be without a preservative influence. The darkness will deepen.

It is not what we ought to be, but what we are, that counts. Am I the salt of the earth and the light of the world?

## Wednesday Week 32 Teaching of Jesus

Bible Reading: Matt. 5:17-20

Q 127 How is living for the kingdom of God different from living by the law?

A. Kingdom living is more righteous than living by the law.

There is an old story about a little girl who did something wrong. Her mother punished her by making her sit in a corner. The girl sat for a while and then said, "I'm sitting down on the outside, but I'm standing up on the inside." She was outwardly doing what she was told, but in her heart she was not obedient.

Jesus taught us that it is more important to do things from the heart than to just have everything right on the outside. The scribes and Pharisees didn't want anyone to see them do anything wrong. But Jesus knew that they did not have a heart of love for God. In fact, their hearts were hard. They had an outside righteousness, but inside they were sinners. Jesus said that people who were in his kingdom would have hearts that were right on the inside and would also do the right things on the outside.

### Thinking Deeper

How do we measure righteousness? Is it by keeping outward standards of modesty? That is important, but Muslim women dress more modestly than most Christian women, at least in America. Is righteousness measured by abstaining from alcohol and tobacco? That is certainly healthy, and Mormons have adopted those prohibitions in a large measure. Is righteousness measured by staying by your beliefs and being willing to be persecuted for them? Jehovah's Witnesses are very vocal about their beliefs and are quite willing to endure scorn and ridicule. This is not to take away from these kinds of issues or their place in lifestyle, but notice that it is possible to have these outward lifestyles and not be at all an example of a Christian.

Jesus was clear that those in His kingdom would have a righteousness that exceeded the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, who kept the law out of duty and cultural mandate. Jesus did not come to destroy the law. He came to fulfill the law. People in his kingdom keep the law because they love their King. Unless we love the king, keeping the rules of the kingdom falls short of kingdom righteousness.

## Thursday    Week 32    Teaching of Jesus

Bible Reading: Matt. 5:21-26

Q 128 What is more important than giving offerings to God?

A. Living with a Christian attitude toward others is more important than offerings.

You can offer more than money to God. You can offer your singing to God, or offer your prayer to God, or offer helping others to God. But while you are offering things to God, make sure you have a good attitude toward others. A family was asked to sing in a church. They had several children who sang. But one little boy did not sing with the rest of his family. "Why isn't this boy singing?" they were asked. "We have a rule that if you don't live for Jesus during the week, you don't sing on Sunday," answered the mother. She understood something about what is important to God.

Remember the story of Cain and Abel? Abel offered something to God, and it was accepted. Cain's offering was not accepted, and Cain was so angry that he killed his brother. Cain gave an offering, but it would have pleased God far more if Cain had loved his brother instead of killing him. If you have something to offer to God, it is a good thing. God loves a cheerful giver. But if you are offering something to God, but have a bad attitude toward another person, God will not be pleased. Make sure you keep in mind what is most important to God.

### Thinking Deeper

If a person doesn't have a giving attitude, he probably doesn't have the spirit of Christ. The newest believers are told to stop stealing, but rather work so they can give to others in need (Ephesians 4:28). Giving to God is a significant part of the Christian life. Paying tithes and offerings is the one thing God challenges people to test Him on. He said see if He will pour out a blessing on the one who gives. Giving can come in different forms. Whatever you do in your service to God is looked upon as a gift brought to the altar. Yet Jesus said it would be better to stop bringing your gift if you have a bad relationship with someone else. "Leave there thy gift."

A youth leader publicly rebuked one of his students for something that was really insignificant. As the leader prepared to give a Bible lesson, he realized that he should leave his gift and be reconciled to the student. He made a public apology. Only after he received the forgiveness of the student did he feel clear to offer his gift.

Don't try to use your gift while you are violating a greater mandate. The greater mandate is to love one another. If you are trying to offer service to God but have a sour relationship, put your service on hold and work on reconciliation.

## Friday      Week 32      Teaching of Jesus

Review the Week's questions.

- Q 125 What did Jesus teach his disciples?  
A. He taught them how to live as part of the kingdom of heaven.
- Q 126 How does a follower of Jesus change the world?  
A. They are like salt and light.
- Q 127 How is living for the kingdom of God different from living by the law?  
A. Kingdom living is more righteous than living by the law.
- Q 128 What is more important than giving offerings to God?  
A. Living with a Christian attitude toward others is more important than offerings.

A little boy thought that when he asked Jesus in his heart, he would die and go to heaven. One day he was thinking about it. He wanted to be ready for heaven, but wasn't sure he wanted to go so soon. He asked his mother, "Mommy, do you have Jesus in your heart?" "Why, yes," she answered. "Well, you are still alive, and not in heaven," he said. His mother told him that when you ask Jesus into your heart, you are ready for heaven if you die, but that doesn't mean you will die right away. The boy was happy to ask Jesus into his heart.

Being a Christian is more than just getting ready to go to heaven. Jesus taught us how to live while we are on earth. The people who are going to heaven become part of the kingdom of heaven when they trust in Jesus. They don't go right to heaven, but start living like people who are going there. That means they listen to what Jesus says. Jesus said a lot about living in the Sermon on the Mount. He taught us how to live as part of the kingdom of heaven.

### Thinking Deeper

H. E. Schmul once said that it is as important to keep a saint as it is to make one. Included in his meaning is that people need to learn how to live the Christian life. If we don't live like Christians, there is a pretty good chance that we aren't a Christian. A big part of the truth that Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount is that being consistent as a Christian is an important part of the kingdom of heaven. Someone has said that each of us is either a "part of the problem or part of the solution." Another saying is that "each person is either a missionary or a mission field."

Kingdom living is for all Christians. It is the life of the believer that will tell a story of righteousness. In this evil world, the great contribution of Christians is that they are a force for love, for truth and for right living. That is the message Jesus proclaimed. Think about the implications: people who claim to be Christians but who do not live the life Jesus described are hardly believable. Kingdom living marks the Christian.