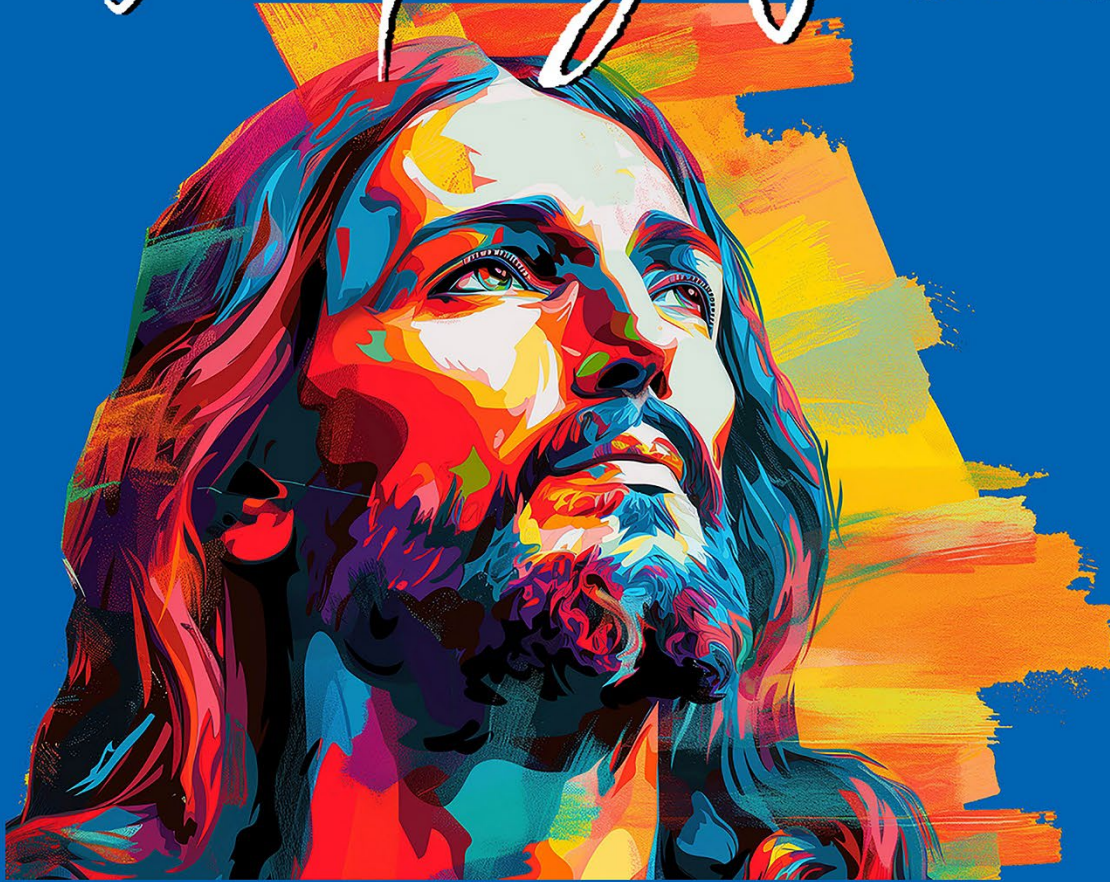


Finding Jesus



Embracing the Complete
Gospel of Jesus, the Christ.

CHARLES S. STUART

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FIRST FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

Jesus is the Son of God.

I. Jesus is the Son of God.

The Gospel of Jesus is clear on this point. Jesus of Nazareth was born as a human with the divinity of God. Jesus is the Son of God. This is stated clearly in Apostle John's first words about Jesus; by God Himself saying it about His Son; and when Simon, to be later named Peter, declared He is the Son of God.

From the Beginning.

1 ¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. John 1:1-5 ¹

Unlike the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the Gospel of John does not begin with a recounting of the birth of Jesus. John prophesized, in verses 1-5, the origin and nature of Jesus in words that are not just beautiful, they are true.

Read the full context, found in John 1:1-18, and decide the meaning for yourself. Take your time. Discuss it with friends, teachers, and pastors, and pray for guidance and understanding.

The Word from the Son of God is the latest Word from God.

This leaves us with a challenge. If this is true, do we believe with complete faith that Jesus is, and has been, the Son of God? On this answer rests the entirety of what the Gospel of Jesus teaches.

¹ Additional scriptural background found at John 1:1-18.

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.

His Baptism.

1 ⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Mark 1:9-11 ²

Mark's version of Jesus's baptism is simple, direct, and powerful. Note this was the voice of God, the Father, blessing His only child with what all children long to hear: "You are My Son, the Beloved; with You I AM well pleased."

This was the first act of Jesus's adult ministry, and it set the stage for the rest of His life, both for ushering in the Kingdom of God on Earth and for His death and resurrection to offer eternal salvation.

When in times of doubt, He knew His Father was with Him. When He was tempted, He knew His Father was with Him. When He was too tired to go on, He knew His Father was with Him. When followers came and left, He knew His Father was with Him. At the point of trial and death, He knew His Father was with Him.

Simon Says it Out Loud.

16 ¹⁵He (Jesus) said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."

Matthew 16:15-18 ³

2 Other versions found at Matthew 3:13-17, Luke 3:21-22 & John 1:29-34.

3 Additional scriptural background found at Matthew 16:13-20.

Other versions found at Mark 8:27-30, Luke 9:18-21 & John 6:67-69.

Matthew records that Jesus asked His disciples, later in His ministry, two questions (See Mark and Luke versions). “Who do people say that I am?” followed by “But who do you say that I am.”

The first question allowed the disciples to search their memory for what they heard. The second question searched their soul for what they believed. And Simon (later known as Peter) said, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Simon became the first person to figure out who Jesus was, and he would never be the same again. Even Jesus knew that this answer came from somewhere deep inside this fisherman, somewhere that God revealed.

With his answer, Simon, now Peter, became the first to decipher what Jesus had been teaching, even though later actions would indicate Peter didn’t yet fully understand the import of what he said. Jesus knew Peter.

That’s part of the reason why Jesus said, “I will build My church,” rather than “My church is completed.” Peter, like all of us, was a work in progress, but he already knew the foundation — Jesus was the “Son of the living God.”

CONCLUSION.

The Gospel of Jesus is based on what Jesus said and did. It is based on what He said and did because of who He was and is — the Son of God. Before Jesus, God spoke through leaders like Moses and prophets like Isaiah.

Jesus, though, was completely human **AND** completely God. God had decided to speak directly to the people through the words and deeds of Jesus, and, as such, His words are the latest we have heard from God.

Because Jesus is the Son of God, we can hear directly from the heart, mind, and spirit of God.

So, it is paramount that we study His words and deeds to glean what Jesus expects of His Followers so that we can establish the Kingdom

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.

of God on Earth. Let's start with pledging to know, understand, and obey what Jesus, the Son of God, said and did.

Would that we all know what Peter knew. "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Where do you stand?

Do you believe that what Jesus said is the Word of God? Why?

Do you also believe that what Jesus said is the latest Word from God? Why?

The words that Jesus, the Son of God, spoke are equal in authority with those of God, His Father.

When Jesus said, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” and “...for I was sent for this purpose,” His followers should take Him at His Word.

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SECOND FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

**Jesus Came to Establish the
Kingdom of God on Earth.**

II. Jesus Came to Establish the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Why did Jesus come to live among us? For too long we have heard one answer from most Protestant churches in America. Jesus came to die for our sins. Full stop.

But this truth is just not the whole truth. In His first public sermon Jesus answered this question in His first public sermon of His ministry. It's right there, in the Gospel of Jesus.

The Kingdom of God on Earth is Like...

Jesus was in Nazareth on Sabbath day, and as He would do many times whenever He was near a synagogue, He attended. As a rabbi (teacher) He was often allowed to read the day's lesson and comment on its meaning. It was like a small group bible study.

4 ¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

4 ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Luke 4:16-19 ¹

¹ Additional scriptural background found at Luke 4:14-30.
Other versions found at Matthew 13:53-58 & Mark 6:1-6a.

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.

The “Year of the Lord’s Favor.”

When Jesus stood up to read the lesson in vv. 18-19, He didn’t just read from the scroll in Isaiah. He rearranged Isaiah 61:1-2 removing some phrases, adding some of His own, and quoting part of one verse from Isaiah 58:6. The bold text shown are what Jesus used in Luke 4:18-19.

61 ¹The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, ²to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn.

Isaiah 61:1-2

58 ⁶“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?” Isaiah 58:6

Jesus repurposed verses from Isaiah to make it clear He was talking about the “year of the Lord’s favor,” when all things would be made right and justice, righteousness, and mercy would prevail. But He didn’t stop there.

We can know from this that what Jesus “read,” as recorded by Luke, was more than reading an ancient, albeit important, prophet’s words. The changes He made specifically clarified His personal mission on Earth. When you read this text in Luke you can see the Gospel of Jesus plain and simple. It was precisely what Jesus wanted to say as His first words in front of His home synagogue about why He was there, with them, and with us.

Jesus announces this prophecy is fulfilled.

4²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4:20-21

"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." With these words Jesus declares this prophecy fulfilled — something only God could do — and it was fulfilled by Jesus, who they knew as a neighbor, a good teacher, one of them; but only God could fulfill prophecy.

So, what was He saying? Was He deluded? Did He know what He was saying? How could this be?

Later Jesus Confirms His Mission.

Jesus confirmed this as His purpose a few days later in the same chapter.

4⁴³ But he said to them, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose." ⁴⁴ So he continued proclaiming the message in the synagogues of Judea. Luke 4:43-44 ²

Note that He said, *"this purpose,"* not "a purpose." This is why the living Jesus came. He was clearly referring to the Kingdom of God on Earth that He had come to establish.

The Kingdom of God on Earth was no longer a future dream world. With the arrival of Jesus, the dream began to take form. With these words the world began to tilt on its moral and spiritual axes and the long journey toward justice and righteousness began.

There was no need for more waiting. The Kingdom of God was here and was seated in the very room with them. And, for His Followers, He has been seated in the very room with us since that time.

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.

The “good news” Jesus refers to is from the Isaiah prophesy, and in Jesus’s use in Luke, written in koiné Greek, it would later become “gospel” in English translations.

Jesus says it is God’s will for the Kingdom of God on Earth to be established by Jesus.

6¹⁰ “your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”
Matthew 6:10³

Many raised in the Southern Baptist Convention, like I was in the 1950-60’s, were taught various forms of the “will of God.” But the “Kingdom of God on Earth” as Jesus taught was not one of them. The life, works, and words of Jesus were taught, but not as a primary element of the “Gospel” but as good standards for living...albeit optional since the “Gospel” assured eternal salvation with, or without, the Gospel of Jesus.

Here Jesus introduces that the will of God is for God’s kingdom to come on Earth as it is in heaven. By placing this thought in the most common prayer of His time, and ours, He reminds us of its importance in the lives of His Followers.

This line, “*your kingdom come...*” is the definition of the Gospel of Jesus. It is a plea — and a promise — for the Kingdom of God on Earth to become the norm for all humankind for all time.

If we pray like Jesus taught, and mean it, we must strive to usher in the Kingdom of God on Earth. If we do not mean it, or if we pray but neglect to act out the prayer, we should feel the “fear and trembling” of a disappointed God.

2 Additional scriptural background found at Luke 4:42-44.

3 Additional scriptural background found at Matthew 6:7-15.
Other versions found at Matthew 13:53-58 & Mark 6:1-6a.

CONCLUSION.

Jesus uses His first public comment to announce His “purpose,” to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth. He also described what the Kingdom of God on Earth would be like. And later, during the Sermon on the Mount, while talking about the framework for praying, He said that this wasn’t just His “purpose,” but that His “purpose” was the “will” of God.

In just ten verses (vv. Luke 4:16-21, 42-44; Matthew 6:10) Jesus embarked on changing what He expects His Followers to do both then...and now.

For His Followers this is a radical purpose that requires radical belief and radical living, remembering what Jesus said, *“I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

Jesus came to fulfill the promise God made to bring the Kingdom of God to Earth. Jesus’s life and teaching prepared His followers to continue the mission. That’s what He expects of His followers today.

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.

Where do you stand?

What do you think it means to “usher in the Kingdom of God on Earth?”

A large, empty rectangular box with a red border, intended for a written response to the question above.

What role do followers have as “ushers” of the Kingdom of God on Earth?

A large, empty rectangular box with a red border, intended for a written response to the question above.

How is Christ’s redemptive work (crucify, resurrected) a part of ushering in the Kingdom of God on Earth?

A large, empty rectangular box with a red border, intended for a written response to the question above.

In the Gospel of Jesus the will of God, as Jesus defined it in the Lord's Prayer, is to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth that Jesus came to fulfill.

Nothing less. Nothing more.

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THIRD FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

Jesus Established 'Love God'
and 'Love Others' as a New
Priority for God's Law.

III. Jesus Established ‘Love God’ and ‘Love Others’ as a New Priority for God’s Law.

Until Jesus, God had chosen to “speak” through those He appointed as prophets and others, like Abraham and Moses. With Jesus, however, humans for the first and only time, could talk with God face-to-face even though many did not understand what He said or who He really was.

Mosaic Law had been introduced almost 1,500 years before the birth of Jesus and had been codified by the ruling priests as the law for the basis of living for the Jews. When Jesus began teaching it had been over 400 years since the last prophet of the Old Testament.

400 years of silence.

WORLD TURNED ↻ UPSIDE DOWN.

The Jewish religious ruling hierarchy believed, and enforced, the 613 laws and regulations of Mosaic Law. The Jewish people had been taught these laws for generations and their lives were supposed to be shaped around them.

Jesus’s mission was to move the focus from the “jot and tittle” legalism of the Mosaic Law to God’s law of love.

This message turned the religious world of the Jews upside down. And it still does today. His teachings and actions, particularly when He knowingly provoked the law and tradition, were what made Him dangerous to the Jewish leaders. It was for this that Jewish leadership challenged Him, provoked Him, and finally had Him killed.

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.

“On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Of the many profound statements Jesus made there is one that stands above all. The Gospel of Jesus, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, give similar versions. In Matthew (v. 35) it starts with a question from a religious lawyer, “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

22 ³⁷ He (Jesus) said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.’ ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Matthew 22:37-40 ¹

Before these words of Jesus, the law and the teaching of the prophets were paramount. After them they became the basis for a new ordering of the commandments of the law. No more counting cumin* — it was now justice, mercy, and faith that matter more than religious legalism.

In effect, the traditional law would now be filtered through this new preamble, and if the law did not meet the filter of ‘love God and love others’ then it should be replaced with one that does. What, then, is this “love” that Jesus spoke about to the religious lawyer?

* “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others.” — Matthew 23:23

1 Additional scriptural background found at Matthew 22:34-40.
Other versions found at Mark 12:28-34 & Luke 10:25-28.

“You shall love the Lord your God . . . you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus combined two elements of “love” using quotes from the era of Moses, the very beginning of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). The first element is the Shema (to listen, hark, hear and do), the central prayer in Judaism. It is a statement of belief in one God and describes how to “love the Lord your God.”

The second element Jesus includes in His new commandment is “love your neighbor as yourself,” which is also found in the Hebrew Bible. This new commandment can be expressed simply as “Love God. Love Others.”

“Hear, O Israel: the Lord is Our God, the Lord alone.”

The opening phrase of the Shema, found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, “Sh’ma Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Echad,” translated as . . .

6⁴Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. ⁵You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Deuteronomy 6:4-5

This prayer is the most important of the Jewish liturgy, said at least twice daily, and has a revered place during Yom Kipper, the holiest day of the year in Judaism. It defines that there is but one God.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”

What follows in verse 5, though, is a commandment for His people to *“love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”*

This is an all-consuming, with everything we are, for all time, to show our love for Him by our acts of commitment to obey Him, to serve Him, and to worship Him. His love for us is perfect because He is “the lord,” but we are not perfect, but He expects our full devotion and effort,

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.

remembering that in our imperfection we are, through His grace, forgiven and made righteous.

“You Shall Love Your Neighbor as Yourself.”

The second element is quoted by Jesus from Leviticus 19:18b, *“you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* Interestingly, a few verses down, in Leviticus 19:34b is, “you shall love the alien as yourself.” Does this mean that “the alien” is your neighbor?

Loving your neighbor as yourself is an act of God’s love for you. We are to put ourselves second when dealing with others who are in distress, persecuted, outcast, oppressed, lonely — these are anathema to God’s love for us and we are to intercede when and where we can with sacrificial acts of love.

“Just as I Have Loved You, You Also Should Love One Another.”

The setting in John is very different. It’s in the upper room, supper is finished, and Judas has left. This is the last time He will spend extended time with His followers before the events leading to His death, and He begins what is known as the “Farewell Discourse” (John 13:31 to the end of chapter 17).

Jesus sets the tone for this final discourse by announcing, not for the first time, that He is leaving them.

13 ³³“Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’” John 13:33

Then Jesus gives them a “new commandment” that sounds familiar but raises the bar from the earlier answer He gave to the religious lawyer, from “love your neighbor as yourself” to “love as I have loved you.”

13 ³⁴“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one

another.³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35

If anything is clear in the Gospel of Jesus, it is this — the priority of His Followers must be acts of His love in His name. Full stop.

When churches stand for displaying the Ten Commandments and ignoring this New Commandment, they do so at the risk of hearing these words of Jesus, *“Woe to you...hypocrites!”*

The purpose of Jesus, our purpose as His Followers, is to love God and love others as Jesus taught in the Gospel of Jesus. This is the New Commandment.

Jesus came to show a better way. A way of love. Not a love defined by feelings or emotion. His love, God’s love is defined by what His followers do for others.

It is not tough love, but a love that is tough. This “love that is tough” demands our very best, and the good news — what it looks like and sounds like — is written in the Gospel of Jesus.

“The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

Jesus set an example for His priority of love over law by using the laws for observing the Sabbath. The Sabbath laws were the most important to the temple leaders and to the people on farms, in the villages, towns, and cities.

He chose two episodes to teach the concept of love over law first by reaping, winnowing, and eating wheat on the Sabbath; then He healed a withered hand, in a synagogue, on the Sabbath. Also, He did this openly, in the presence of people who had gathered, His followers, and some of the Pharisees.

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.

Harvesting Grain on the Sabbath.

Here's how Matthew recorded the "grain harvesting violation." Similar versions are found in Mark and Luke.

12 ¹At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. ²When the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the sabbath." ³He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? ⁴He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests. ⁵Or have you not read in the law that on the sabbath the priests in the temple break the sabbath and yet are guiltless? ⁶I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. ⁷But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. ⁸For the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath."

Matthew 12:1-8 ²

A first thing to note in the story is the Pharisees' claim, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." (v. 2). They use the only frame of reference they had, to enforce the "jot and tittle" of the law.

Jesus answered with a short history lesson about David receiving "the bread of Presence" from the altar in violation of tradition and reminded the Pharisees that the Law allowed priests to break the Sabbath without guilt.

Jesus claims that He is "*something greater than the temple*," (v. 6). His use of "temple" represents not the building, but the totality of the religious structure: the Law, rules, tradition, and culture. The Pharisees and other religious leaders made the culture of legalism more important than seeing their role through God's prism of love for others.

2 Other versions found at Mark 2:23-28 & Luke 6:1-5.

"I tell you," (v. 6), echoes His prior claim, made in His first public appearance (Luke 4:16-21). He is the Son of God changing how the Law will be viewed in His Kingdom of God on Earth.

Jesus states clearly what He desires, "*mercy and not sacrifice*" over condemning the "*guiltless*," (v. 7). He reminds those listening of something He said earlier in His ministry, just after calling Matthew.

9¹³ "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous but sinners." Matthew 9:13³

Eight hundred years earlier the prophet Hosea spoke for God when he said (Hosea 6:6), "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice; the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."

Isaiah, writing for God c. 600 BCE, challenged the people to turn away from displays of false piety by treating others through the genuine love for God. It's in Chapter 58. The first half (vv. 1-5) is an indictment by God on the people for their false piety. The second half (vv. 6-14) is what pleases God.

Jesus's statement makes it plain to any with ears to listen,

"For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Healing a Withered Hand on the Sabbath.

3¹ Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. ² They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. ³ And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." ⁴ Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. ⁵ He looked around at them with anger; he

³ Other versions found at Mark 2:13-17 & Luke 5:27-32.

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.

was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.⁶ The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. Mark 3:1-6⁴

Mark's story is straight forward. Jesus was in a synagogue, saw a man with a withered hand, and said, "*Come forward*" (v. 3). Then, He asked of those in the room, "*Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?*" (v. 4). This was not a rhetorical question, "But they were silent."

Then comes a look we don't want to ever see from Jesus, "*He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart...*" (v. 5).

Woe to those who anger and grieve the heart of Jesus.

In the face of Pharisaical resistance, Jesus continued to make the point that loving God and loving others overrules the religious rules and laws of the church.

CONCLUSION.

Jesus wants His Followers to love God and love others with wild, reckless abandon. It's what the world needs and we're the only ones who can make it so. This "love that is sacrificial" demands our very best.

⁴ Other versions found at Matthew 12:9-14 & Luke 6:6-11.

Where do you stand?

How does Jesus saying that “love your God” and “love others” change the relationship with the Law and prophets of the Old Testament?

What does loving others with wild, reckless abandon look or sound like?

What makes loving others so hard?

Finding Jesus

Embracing the Complete
Gospel of Jesus, the Christ.



FOURTH FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

Faith, Mountains, and
Mustard Seeds.

IV. Faith, Mountains, and Mustard Seeds.

“The kingdom of heaven is like...”

Jesus liked to use parables, short stories that explain complex ideas in simple terms. Altogether, He told twenty-four parables which are recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

In eight of the eleven parables recorded in Matthew (see the list of these scriptures below) Jesus begins with *“The kingdom of heaven is like...”* and in the rest He says *“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to...”*

Matthew 13:24

Matthew 13:31

Matthew 13:33

Matthew 13:44

Matthew 13:45

Matthew 13:47

Matthew 13:52

Matthew 18:23

Matthew 20:1

Matthew 22:2

Matthew 25:1

Here and in many other places, Jesus literally taught what the “kingdom of heaven” was like, and in the Lord’s Prayer He taught that the will of God is for “kingdom of heaven” to be established on earth.

Parable of a mustard seed.

13 ³¹He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³²it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

Matthew 13:31-32 ¹

The Parable of the Mustard Seed compares the smallest of seeds that grow into large bushes or trees with the germination of the kingdom of heaven; even from a tiny seed, the kingdom of heaven can produce results far greater than thought possible.

1 Other versions found at Mark 40:30-32 & Luke 13:18-19.

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.

This idea of small beginnings resulting in outsized outcomes is found throughout Biblical history. A few of my favorites are Joseph's rise from slave to co-ruler of Egypt, Moses leading the people out of bondage, David and his mighty men resisting Saul, Gideon winnowing thousands down to 300 to defeat a mighty army, and many more.

From the smallest beginning great things can rise. With just a handful of disciples a movement that began with Jesus's life produced hundreds if not thousands of followers.

Against all odds the followers of Jesus, the Christ, would grow to become the largest religion of the empire in less than 300 years. Today, almost 2,000 years after His death this small seed is now the most powerful force for good in the world. Not bad for the smallest of seeds.

Faith the size of a mustard seed.

Having established the power a small seed can produce we come now to Jesus comparing the mustard seed directly to the power of the Kingdom of God on Earth as it is in heaven.

The Divinity of Jesus Affirmed.

The story of the healing of the epileptic son who the disciples could not heal happens just after Jesus appears on the mountain, along with Moses and Elijah, where "his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white." Peter, stunned by the appearance, asked Jesus if he should make "three dwellings" for them. But then...

13 ⁵While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." ⁸And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

Matthew 17:5-8 ²

Having just shown Peter, James, and John His transfiguration, an event that confirmed His divinity, they came down from the mountain and were met by a crowd and a desperate man pleading for healing for his son.

“You faithless and perverse generation...”

Compounding the tension, the father states, “I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him.” Among the crowd were some disciples of Jesus, likely those who did not go with Jesus up the mountain.

17 ¹⁴When they came to the crowd, a man came to him, knelt before him, ¹⁵and said, “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; he often falls into the fire and often into the water. ¹⁶“And I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him.” ¹⁷Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him here to me.” ¹⁸And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly.

Matthew 17:16-18 ³

Jesus rebukes His disciples for not having the faith to believe that His gift of the power of healing was real, thus failing in their attempts to heal this boy.

 We should always remember, Jesus was fully human as well as fully divine and I, for one, give Him grace for calling them out for thinking they could say the words without true, deep, and total assurance that God’s power is real and available for them to use in establishing the Kingdom of God on Earth.

2 Additional scriptural background found at Matthew 17:1-4.
Other versions found at Mark 9:2-10 & Luke 9:28-36.

3 Additional scriptural background found at Matthew 17:14-21.
Other versions found at Mark 9:14-29 & Luke 9:37-43.

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.



We should always remember, Jesus was fully human as well as fully divine and I, for one, give Him grace for calling them out for thinking they could say the words without true, deep, and total assurance that God's power is real and available for them to use in establishing the Kingdom of God on Earth.

To Jesus, this sacred gift was not to be casually treated. I can feel the tingle of righteous anger and indignation in Jesus's words at their failure to take Him seriously. Can't you?

The last phrase of verse 17 and verse 18 seem almost anti-climactic. “*Bring him here to me.*’ And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly.”

“Why could we not cast it out?”

The disciples accepted the harsh words of Jesus, and, in private, asked, “Why could we not cast it out?” And Jesus, now speaking softly, answered their question with, “*Because of your little faith.*”

17 ¹⁹ Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” ²⁰ He said to them, “Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.”

Matthew 17:19-20 ⁴

His explanation of “little faith” establishes a model for turning “little faith” into mountain-moving faith which contains four elements (faith, mustard seed, move, and mountain). These four elements will guide our thoughts and actions in establishing the Kingdom of God on Earth.

4 Additional scriptural background found at Matthew 17:14-21, Mark 9:14-29 & Luke 9:37-43a, 5:6.

FAITH. MUSTARD SEED. MOVE. MOUNTAIN.

For followers of the Gospel of Jesus “faith” is a misunderstood word. There are many degrees of faith such as faith in gravity or the sun will rise tomorrow. Faith that a chair is sturdy enough to hold me. Faith that my favorite team will play well.

! “Faith” is accepting as true something that cannot be proven objectively. It also seems that faith has a future element to it. Something we believe, think, hope, or expect to happen.

Consider those who witnessed, first-hand, the resurrected Christ. They knew without any doubt that Jesus died and then appeared to them after His death. There was nothing more that could be done to convince them of this truth, or to change their minds. They were called “believers,” people who had seen and know without any question that what they experienced did happen.

But as the story was passed down from generation to generation the meaning of faith moved from a personal belief in the power to do astonishing things through Jesus, the Christ, to a reliance on trusting the “church” to provide spiritual guidance and intervention in their lives.

Eventually, after 1,500 years, the tension of personal faith in Jesus, the Christ, or faith in the church to “move mountains” resulted in the Reformation. Protestants wanted the church out of the line of authority in favor of a direct relationship with Jesus, the Christ.

Is “Faith” different from “Belief?”

! “Faith” is a sincere hope that something is true even if it can’t be proven by objective means. “Belief” is knowing that something is true based on personal observation or widely accepted evidence.

Faith can also apply to existential concepts like life or death, victory or defeat, or catastrophic disaster (weather, earthquake, volcano,

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.

wildfire), usually involving faith that these things will not happen, or happen to us, or happen imminently.

Faith can be the hope that illness or death can be cured, accidents or trauma stopped, an outcome reversed, an errant child returned to the right path.

For many it is practical, “I have faith when I apply the brake my car will slow down.” Or “My faith in you to do the right thing is genuine and well earned.”

Faith also contains an element of doubt in the form of a safety net. Our human experience is we have faith, but that faith is often unfulfilled, and when that happens, we have a variety of choices. We can disregard the original faith by thinking, “How could I have thought it was probable?” Or we develop a ‘plan B’ which usually consists of lowering our ‘faith-pectations.’

FAITH. **MUSTARD SEED.** MOVE. MOUNTAIN.

In Matthew 17:20, Jesus answered the disciples’ question about their inability to heal the boy with, “*Because of your little faith...if you have faith the size of a mustard seed...*” He reminded the disciples of His parable about mustard seeds, particularly their small size and their capacity to grow into something far bigger than might be thought.

Most importantly the mustard seed represented the power of the Kingdom of God. The problem isn’t that Jesus wants us to have more faith, He wants us to have pure faith. The faith that He is the Son of God. Absolute belief that Jesus is the Son of God and by asking something in His name establishes the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Faith for a Christian is not believing that God will heal a loved one; rather it is believing God has the *power to heal a loved one... or not*. After all, God’s ways are not our ways as Isaiah makes clear.

55 ⁸“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Isaiah 55:8-9 ⁵

How can our faith help facilitate the answer we seek? For instance, asking God to heal someone of a disease includes not just a miracle, it also includes what we can do, personally, to improve the situation. In many cases, we can provide access to services that help and support the availability of those services in our community, even in our nation and the world.

Faith, like love, isn't passive. Faith is active preparation and action on our part to make the path possible for the mountain to move, if not in our lifetime, then in the future when others have joined in the effort to change what we think is impossible.

Remember, for God, nothing is impossible.

FAITH. MUSTARD SEED. **MOVE.** MOUNTAIN.

Our faith does not move the mountain, God moves it. Trusting God to move the mountain through His power is activated by the faith we have in God for who He is.

Jesus, in Matthew 19:26, states, *“For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.”*⁶

“Move” takes two forms for the follower. 1) Is “to move God to perform a miracle” which is an event where God is circumventing the natural order to do something extraordinary. 2) Is “to move ourselves to do more than we thought or believe is possible.”

⁵ Additional scriptural background found at Isaiah 55:6-7.

⁶ Additional scriptural background found at Matthew 19:23-26, Mark 10:23-27 & Luke 18:18-26.

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.

Move God to perform a miracle that only God can do.

The Gospel of Jesus records His miracles that can be categorized as healing, raising the dead, feeding multitudes, rebuking demons, and more.

Throughout history, what was perceived as a miracle was not the healing, per se, but the scientific discovery and development of cures for diseases and conditions that in earlier times appeared to be miraculous but now are commonplace.

The miracle often is in the right person, at the right time, adding to human knowledge powerful ideas and insights that have transformed the world as we know it.

Even when a miracle seems needed, we must remember that we, as ushers along with Jesus, have something we can contribute.

Move ourselves to do more than we think or believe is possible to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth.

We all have knowledge, experience, and connections that we can call upon to add value to almost any solution. The challenge is do we have faith that we have something vital to add to a seemingly impossible situation.

If we have the faith to ask God for a miracle, certainly that same faith applies to me and you, finding what we have to offer, then doing it. If this is true, why aren't more Followers of Jesus, the Christ engaging their knowledge, experience, and connections more readily?

Could it be that we have "little faith?" And that the solution is right there in Matthew 17:20, *"if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."*

In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus tells the story of "The Last Judgment" using sheep and goats to portray those who lived according to the Kingdom of God on Earth or didn't.

In this story the sheep are those who serve 'the least of these' with faith and purpose, and don't realize that they are doing something special. They are heaven bound. But the goats choose not to serve 'the least of these' to their peril. They are destined to eternal punishment.

Jesus says we should take seriously our role in ushering in the Kingdom of God on Earth, using the faith we have.

FAITH. MUSTARD SEED. MOVE. **MOUNTAIN.**

For decades of my life, I thought anything was possible with my sincere belief that God would make it happen. It says so, I thought, in this famous quote from Jesus, recorded in Matthew 17:20,

17²⁰ . . . if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you." Matthew 17:20

This seemed to me to be reinforced by Paul in his letter to the Philippians 4:13, "*I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*" (Also see Philippians 4: versions.)

In effect, through my earnest belief, and the promises of Jesus and Paul, I thought what I strongly desired could manifest through the power of Jesus.

On the surface this made sense. It wasn't until later, that I realized that what I strongly desired for my life doesn't always happen despite my earnest belief and relying on the promises of Jesus.

When I finally realized that my desires, and what God wants for me, are often very different things, and that I cannot read God's mind for what He wants for me specifically, I began to understand that God has already told me what it is He wants for me in general.

He wants me to conform to what Jesus taught about establishing the Kingdom of God on Earth and expects me to apply the Gospel of Jesus to my life and the lives of people in my life.

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.

We all face mountains in our lives. Some are mountains of our own making, others are beyond our understanding, and still others are beyond the realm of possibility.

Jesus faced mountains, too. Some He climbed with divine intervention. Others He taught His Followers to rely on their faith in Him and His Father to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth.

It's interesting that when you stand at the foot of a mountain or high cliff it looks impossible to climb. But, seen from a distance, the mountain appears small, and climbable.

Some mountains require miracles...when God circumvents the natural order to do something extraordinary.

If a mountain requires God circumventing the natural order to do something extraordinary, all that can be expected is that God may choose to intervene. His intervention may well be a mystery we cannot understand, but we should still apply our faith, energy, and effort to move the mountain.

Other mountains are of our own making.

Some are beyond our ability to overcome them. In my life, these mountains have included the serious health of those I love, the loss of a job, the loss of a child at birth, parenting a troubled teenager, aging pains, depression, and a slowly deteriorating brain injury. These mountains, and dozens more, are part of life, each with its part to play in who I am and have become.

We cannot reverse the role these types of mountains play in our lives, but we can, and should, engage the internal shadows they cast such as fear, anxiety, loneliness, worthiness, grief, and loss of friends. These draw deeply on our faith to grapple with them, especially in the toughest battleground of all — our mind.

Even with the faith Jesus talks about, some mountains can't be moved, not because we don't have faith, but because "my ways are higher than your ways," says the Lord.

A dear friend says it this way! "When things happen in life that are awful and unexplainable — TGA: trust God anyway."

Our faith still overcomes by providing us His hope, His peace, His comfort, His arm around our shoulder, and His shoulder to cry on. Paul speaks eloquently to this in Philippians.

4 ⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7 ⁷

All Things Are possible.

In addition to speaking of faith that moves mountains, Jesus also spoke of belief to do the impossible. In the passage below, only Mark records a brief interaction between Jesus and the father of the possessed boy.

9²¹ Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. ²²It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us." ²³ Jesus said to him, "If you are able! — All things can be done for the one who believes." ²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!" ²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!" Mark 9:21-25 ⁸

7 Additional scriptural background found at Philippians 4:4-5.

8 Additional scriptural background found at Mark 9:14-29.

Other versions found at Matthew 17:14-21 & Luke 9:37-43, 5:6.

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.

Here the father says, “but if you are able to do anything,” (v. 22b) and Jesus replies with emphasis, “*If you are able!*” (v. 23a). By repeating the man’s plea Jesus focused on the father’s unbelief giving him the solution, “*All things can be done for the one who believes*” (v. 23b) and the father immediately cried out, “I believe! Help my unbelief!” (v. 24) With that, Jesus healed the boy.

“What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.”

When Jesus spoke of doing the impossible in Mark 10:23-27, which is also found in Matthew and Luke, He gave two illustrations of how hard it is for some to enter the kingdom of God (vv. 23-25). Then He answered the disciples’ question, “*Then who can be saved?*” (v. 26b) with, “*For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.*” (v.27) (Also see Luke 18:24-26.)

10 ²³ Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” ²⁴ And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁶ They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.” Mark 10:23-27 ⁹

The context of His answer is that it is impossible to get into the kingdom of God in heaven without God doing the impossible and opening the doors to the kingdom.

9 Additional scriptural background found at Mark 10:23-31.
Other versions found at Matthew 19:23-30 & Luke 18:24-30, 22:28-30.

Many have taken this phrase to mean the same thing as Mark 9:23b: *"All things can be done for one who believes."* But entering the kingdom of God in Heaven is only possible by God providing, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ, the miracle of eternal salvation. Amen.

CONCLUSION.

God chooses to move mountains of despair, sorrow, anger, severe illness, and others beyond our ability to move them. We should pray for His intervention.

Jesus moves mountains with the power of the Kingdom of God on Earth through the active involvement of His Followers fulfilling what Jesus taught, promised, and commanded.

Waiting for God to act without engaging your role as a follower of the Gospel of Jesus is not what Jesus expects.

If history has taught us anything, it has been that yesterday's need for a miracle has been largely replaced by the effort, intellect, and passion of people seeking to discover and apply remedies that humans developed, many times by the inspiration to serve humanity as a follower of Jesus, the Christ.

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.

Where do you stand?

What miracles from God have you witnessed?

What miracles have you experienced that were produced by followers of the Gospel of Jesus?

A large, empty rectangular box with a red border, intended for a written response to the question about miracles.

When a situation seems hopeless, what else can you do to usher in the Kingdom of God on Earth?

A large, empty rectangular box with a red border, intended for a written response to the question about ushering in the Kingdom of God.

While it is said that “Christ lives in us,” it doesn’t mean or guarantee that our lives reflect His presence in our lives. Only we, with our actions, can do that.

Jesus is with us, in us, ready to work through us, but only we can make that happen. Unless we decide to do something that reflects, and then do it, it won’t get done.

It’s not that we aren’t doing something, we are.

But are we doing what Jesus did? Are we doing it for those that Jesus cares most about, “the other(s)?” Are we doing it because Jesus expects, even commands, us to?

CHARLES STUART

Finding Jesus

Embracing the Complete
Gospel of Jesus, the Christ.



FIFTH FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

Embrace 'Sermon on the
Mount' Character Traits.

V. Embrace ‘Sermon on the Mount’ Character Traits.

The ‘Sermon on the Mount,’ full of nice ideas and good suggestions, or what Jesus expects of His followers?

Ask yourself, are teachings in the Sermon on the Mount on the same level of “God-inspired” instructions as the Ten Commandments? The Great Commission? The Greatest Commandment? John 3:16?

I believe they should be. Unfortunately, most Protestants in America believe the Sermon on the Mount teachings are just nice words on how to live good lives, but not a mandate from the Son of God for changing our behavior.

In the Gospel of Jesus, Matthew records the Sermon on the Mount in three chapters (5, 6 & 7). The overall theme is to love one another as Jesus has loved us, and His words “turned the world upside down” by reversing what the culture then, and now, says about what is truly important.

Jesus taught, even commanded, that His followers should change from lives of obeying and doing a set of outdated laws to being followers who live the new Way — by the example Jesus set with His life.

The Sermon on the Mount was the second longest teaching of Jesus (the “Final Discourse” in John 13-17 is slightly longer). In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus concentrated His teaching on the people, not the religious leaders or even His closest disciples. Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God on Earth.

The contents of this sermon include famous sayings like the Beatitudes and the Lord’s Prayer, but taken as a whole, the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus’s framework for His follower’s life, actions, spirit, and thoughts.

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.

I have heard sermons preached on “salt and light,” the Beatitudes, on “don’t be anxious” and “beware of false prophets,” one-at-a-time. This piecemeal approach is like a self-help seminar’s bullet points and misses the main point: be like Jesus!

Follow His framework for living.

It would be beneficial to have sermons, or a series of sermons, on how the Sermon on the Mount may well be the definitive description for ushering in the Kingdom of God on Earth. Jesus taught exactly that way, to take His words as a *whole* and let them change how we act — and more importantly — how to be.

Fifteen-character traits have been chosen from the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus said should be evident in the lives of those who call Him “Lord, Lord.” Here are the seven found in the Beatitudes.

- | | |
|--|-------------|
| 1. “Blessed are the poor in spirit. . .” | Matthew 5:3 |
| 2. “Blessed are those who mourn. . .” | Matthew 5:4 |
| 3. “Blessed are the meek. . .” | Matthew 5:5 |
| 4. “Blessed are those who hunger and
thirst for righteousness. . .” | Matthew 5:6 |
| 5. “Blessed are the merciful. . .” | Matthew 5:7 |
| 6. “Blessed are the pure in heart. . .” | Matthew 5:8 |
| 7. “Blessed are the peacemakers. . .” | Matthew 5:9 |

Here are eight other character traits found in the Sermon on the Mount.

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| 8. “ <i>You are the Salt of the earth. . .</i>
and the Light of the World” | Matthew 5:13-16 |
| 9. “Love your enemies and pray for
those who persecute you. . .” | Matthew 5:43-48 |
| 10. “So, whenever you give alms. . .” | Matthew 6:2-4 |
| 11. “You cannot serve God and wealth.” | Matthew 6:19-21, 24 |

12. "So do not worry about tomorrow..." Matthew 6:25-34
13. "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you..." Matthew 7:12-14
14. "Beware of false prophets..." Matthew 7:15-20
15. "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them..." Matthew 7:24-27

The Beatitudes or the "Be-Attitudes?"

Knowing them is not good enough — Jesus expects us to be transformed from "knowing them" to "being and doing them."

It begins with believing the Gospel of Jesus, then living your life actively pursuing what Jesus taught — becoming a follower of Jesus ushering in the Kingdom of God on Earth.

In these seven Beatitudes Jesus does not condemn behavior but teaches His followers new principles for cultivating how to live, love, and act as they usher in the Kingdom of God on Earth.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit..."

5³"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:3¹

When Billy Graham was asked, "What is the meaning of 'poor in spirit' in Matthew 5:3?" He answered:

What did Jesus mean? Simply this: We must be humble in our spirits. If you put the word 'humble' in place of the word 'poor,' you will understand what He meant. In other words, when we come to God, we must realize our own sin and our spiritual emptiness and poverty. We must not be self-satisfied or proud in our hearts, thinking we don't really need God. If we are, God cannot bless us. The Bible says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'

1 Other version found at Luke 6:20.

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.

For those who think they know all the answers about God, think again, remembering *“Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall”* from Proverbs 16:18.

“Blessed are those who mourn...”

5⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

Matthew 5:4 ²

Those who ‘mourn’ exhibit empathy — sharing compassion and understanding for others because they are created by God in His image. Sharing the sorrow, grief, and tears of the brokenhearted and giving the comfort of “being with them” in their despair.

“Blessed are the meek...”

5⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”

Matthew 5:5

The ‘meek’ are not weak — they are strong. The ‘meek’ embrace people for who they are — valued by God, Jesus, and His followers. Jesus often spoke of putting the needs, suffering, pain, and despair of others before Himself, and expects His followers to do the same.

In the Gospel of Jesus, recorded in Matthew, Jesus gives a wonderful definition of the quiet strength and power of being ‘meek.’

11²⁸“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle (meek) and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28-30

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...”

5⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

Matthew 5:6 ³

² Other version found at Luke 6:21b.

³ Other version found at Luke 6:21a.

Have you ever been hungry, truly hungry? I haven't, really. How about being so thirsty that you drink the standing water on a football field after a summer thunderstorm? I have been, and water never tasted sweeter.

Those hearing Jesus knew about hunger and thirst. They also knew about hunger and thirst for something other than food or water. The Jews of that time were a conquered people, living at the whim of the oppressive Roman state.

While Jesus knew of their physical suffering, He applied "hunger and thirst" as a metaphor for craving, desiring, yearning, or longing for "righteousness."

"Blessed are the merciful..."

5 ⁷"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

Matthew 5:7

"Lord, have mercy" is our cry when we know we have wronged others in God's sight. There are many places throughout the Bible where this plea is heard.

Jesus sets being 'merciful' as an attribute He expects in His followers. Why? Because He is merciful, not punishing for wrongs committed against Him. The same can be said for God, and Jesus clearly spoke of 'the Law' as being applied without love or mercy by the church of His day.

 In Jesus's world turned upside down we are to show our love for Jesus by taking undeserved punishment, by forbearing punishment for others when it's in our power. In the Kingdom of God on Earth there is strength in mercy, and we are to show mercy to others as Jesus has shown it to us.

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.

“Blessed are the pure in heart...”

5 ⁸“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

Matthew 5:8

Here, Jesus uses language — ‘pure in heart’ — that for many, including me, addresses the idea of thinking pure thoughts, and that may well be. By linking this to ‘they will see God,’ He takes it to a spiritual plane.

‘Pure in heart,’ from God’s point of view, alludes to a deep commitment to align our heart with the heart of Jesus. We do this by keeping our role in the Kingdom of God on Earth front and center right where Jesus is. We also do this by putting aside any other thought that challenges our concentration on the heart of Jesus.

A parallel verse recorded in Matthew 6:33 echoes and reinforces this teaching.

6 ³³“But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Matthew 6:33

“Blessed are the peacemakers...”

5 ⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

Matthew 5:9

Being at peace is important. In the Gospel of Jesus, in John 14:27, Jesus spoke of ‘peace’ in this familiar passage from the “Farewell Discourse” in the upper room.

14²⁷ “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

John 14:27 ⁴

⁴ Additional scriptural background found at John 14:27-31.

We are to be at peace. But notice Jesus said 'peacemakers' not being at peace. Being a 'peacemaker' is different. A 'peacemaker' seeks to make peace possible in their own spirit and among those with whom they have a relationship.

The scene of Jesus's arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane was full of fear, chaos, confusion, even anger, but certainly not peace. When Peter pulled his sword and struck one of those coming for Jesus, Jesus became a 'peacemaker' for that situation by standing between Peter and the crowd ordering that the sword be put away and then healed the injured man.

Perhaps that is a good definition for 'peacemaker,' one who stands between individuals, or groups, who are at odds with each other.

The "Good Friday Agreement" brought peace to Northern Ireland after decades of often bloody conflict. It happened when key parties on all sides finally came to the conclusion that the only solution was peace. The talks were chaired by the Honorable George J. Mitchell, special envoy from the United States, and leading 'peacemaker.'

There are others like him, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Pope Francis, Jimmy Carter, Desmond Tutu along with pastors, parents, teachers, and yes, even Little League umpires.

The "Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi" offers an example of what a 'peacemaker' does. While there is no historical basis for St. Francis of Assisi being the author, it falls into the category of "something he would have said."

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love...

where there is injury, pardon...

where there is doubt, faith...

where there is despair, hope...

where there is darkness, light...

where there is sadness, joy.

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O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console. . .
to be understood as to understand. . .
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive. . .
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned. . .
it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake...”

5 ¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’
sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ Blessed are you
when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds
of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be
glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way
they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:10-12 ⁵

This blessing in v. 10 is for Jesus’s followers ‘who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.’ Who, then, are ‘those who are persecuted’ that Jesus refers to? Verse 11 holds the answer — those who are persecuted because they follow me.

Those listening who were already followers of Jesus already knew the answer, they felt — to some degree — the stares and glares for associating with this new preacher.

The others in the crowd may have heard ‘persecuted’ and identified with it as applying to them. After all, if you weren’t Roman, you were ‘less than,’ and everyone knew it.

We know Jesus would not stand for persecution for others, especially the weak, the outcast, and women. But that is not what Jesus is saying here. He was speaking of those seeking to know about Him and those who were following Him, even though not fully committed to His way, yet.

5 Other version found at Luke 6:22-23.

Jesus expands on 'persecuted for righteousness' sake' by stressing 'revile you' and 'utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.' Let's explore ways the followers of Jesus are persecuted in America. I believe the biggest persecution faced by the followers of the Gospel of Jesus in America today comes from those who call themselves 'Christian' but disavow what Jesus taught in word and deeds.

We are called and commanded by Jesus to follow His teaching and example even — especially — when it costs us friends, reputation, jobs, or ridicule. It is our honor to stand up for the least and the lost in society; to speak up in favor of the oppressed and marginalized; to be the voice of justice for those persecuted by society, government, and churches who deny the 'least of these.'

As stated in the words of the prophet Amos, in chapter 5, verse 24, *"But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."*

The gap between our own righteousness and God's is filled and made whole by genuine belief in Jesus, the Christ — that Jesus was and is the Son of God; that He was killed and buried; that by the power of God's love Jesus was raised from death; and that those who believe this receive, through the grace of God, a 'clean slate' removing all our shortcomings of righteousness to become eternally whole and one with Jesus and God.

Only God knows our heart. And knowing how we seek to bring righteousness to all people and situations, and when we don't, God alone can judge whether our shortcomings come from outright deceit or willful ignorance which calls into question the sincerity of our belief; or honest failure redeemed by repentance and recommitment to pursue the life of Jesus.

Foundational Truths from the Gospel of Jesus.

Other attributes from the 'Sermon on the Mount.'

The next eight-character traits provide definitions for His Followers to embrace in their lives.

"Salt of the earth...and Light of the world..."

5 ¹³ "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot."

Matthew 5:13 ⁶

Jesus uses metaphor to illustrate two important characteristics His followers should have — to be salt of the earth and light of the world. What did He mean?

Salt is necessary for our lives, and it was so in Jesus's time. Today, we mostly know salt through its use in flavoring food. By itself it is bitter. Properly applied, it accentuates the flavors.

In Jesus's day salt had basic uses beyond flavoring taste. It was rubbed into meat and fish as a preservative. Salt was vital to Jewish religious practice, used in sacrifices. It was also used as a weapon of destruction, sowing fields with salt to make them barren.

Applying these uses of salt to the lives of His followers, Jesus was saying His teaching should be evident in the culture through their lives. Because if we aren't making a difference in our culture, our families, neighbors, workplace, and communities then what value are we adding to the Kingdom of God on Earth?

5 ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ No one, after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

Matthew 5:14-16 ⁷

⁶ Other version found at Luke 14:34-35.

⁷ Other version found at Luke 8:16.

In a world full of darkness Jesus's followers are to be "the light of the world." In today's America, not only is the Kingdom of God on Earth ignored, but it is also repudiated by all levels of society, even the church.

Being the light need not be a grand display, nor does it require advanced planning. It does require preparing for the singular opportunities that come our way as we do the everyday things in our lives. And it will only take a moment — and some courage.

When we hear something said by a family member, friend, co-worker, or stranger that challenges the reality of the Kingdom of God on Earth — listen, then speak up. Your response can range from "I see it differently" to "that's not what the Gospel of Jesus says." Should follow-on discussion occur, don't be silent or combative — do be 'the light of the world — let your light shine.'

Jesus knew this would happen until His way became such a bright light that darkness disappeared in the hearts and souls of all. This begins with the confidence and courage of His followers to let their actions speak louder than the darkness.

"Love your enemies..."

5 ⁴³"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Matthew 5:43-48 ⁸

⁸ Other version found at Luke 6:27-28, 32-36.

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I believe Jesus might have said something like this, “It has been said, ‘I am me and you are you, and I am better than you.’ But I say to you, ‘I AM Me and you are you, and you are better than Me.’”

In my opinion, the first statement above characterizes the sin of ego, where ‘I am better, smarter, richer, more respected, loved, and master.’ In these and many other ways our ego splits the world into ‘me vs. you’ and the ‘I’ always wins.

In Mark 10:43b-45, Jesus said...

“...whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Mark 10:43b-45

Here, Jesus told us that not only is He a servant of others, we are to be servants placing our own ego/self below others, seeing them as not potential enemies but as someone we honor as worthy just as Jesus does.

What Jesus said about ‘love your enemies’ selects a specific group among those to be served by His followers — our ‘enemies.’

But ‘Love’ them? People listening then, and now, hear that and are startled and puzzled. Don’t hate them, maybe, but ‘Love’ them?

Well, yes — that’s what Jesus said. But what did He mean by ‘Love’ them? And who are ‘your’ enemies?

The ‘Love’ used by Jesus here is the same definition as ‘loved’ used in John 3:16 (*agapaó*). The only difference is that in John 3:16 ‘loved the world’ is speaking of God’s complete, self-sacrificing love for all humans; and the ‘Love your enemies’ Jesus described is the love His followers should have for other humans, even enemies.

Being human, however, we can only apply it imperfectly... but still we should try. To not try is to ignore Jesus and calls into question a believer’s salvation commitment.

Matthew was written in koiné Greek where the word for ‘enemies’ is *echthros*. Those listening heard the word as meaning ‘*someone openly hostile, animated by deep-seated hatred, implying irreconcilable hostility, personal hatred bent on inflicting harm.*’

After 2,000 years of translations the English word ‘enemies’ has definitions including *foe, adversary, opponent, antagonist, rival, challenger, competitor, and opposition*. You’ll see that we read ‘enemies’ not so much as ‘*personal hatred bent on inflicting harm*’ but as ‘*opponent or rival.*’

My conclusion is Jesus identified ‘enemies’ as those who have personal hatred toward His followers, not as those having strong disagreement.

The point is Jesus said His followers are to ‘Love’ those who are violently — in word or deed — against us. Imagine, then, how we are to ‘Love’ all the rest within our reach. And if we, sometimes, feel we may be the enemy — we must ‘Love’ ourselves as well.

‘Alms’-giving...

6¹“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. ²“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Matthew 6:1-4

Most Protestant churches in America today do not stress ‘alms’-giving — individual-to-individual giving to “the least of these.” The giving that is encouraged is in the form of a tithe given to the church and

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occasionally giving for major financial needs like buildings or acquiring land.

‘Alms’-giving was accepted and expected among the Jewish people listening to Jesus that day. It was their tradition. We know Jesus knew this tradition because He said ‘when you give alms’ — as written in almost all English translations — is presumptive.

‘Alms’-giving, in a spiritual sense, connected the hearts of both the giver and receiver as God intended. Every person has something, and, in Jesus’s Kingdom of God on Earth, all are to help others who have less.

Jesus also said that ‘alms’-giving was to be done privately between the giver and the receiver to preclude any motivation to seek accolades from others. The accolade of God knowing of our love for Him and obedience to His Word is all that is needed.

Jesus also said, *‘do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.’* At first glance this clearly supports giving privately. I think it has another meaning.

This illustration is another way to describe “muscle memory” — right-handed people throw a ball with their right hand without thinking; accomplished piano players, through long hours and years of practice, play simultaneously with both hands; mothers can hear their child’s cry when others don’t; and a follower of Jesus will go to the help of a stranger in peril without hesitation even if it is difficult.

When we condition our ‘alms’-giving to be such a priority that we see and respond to the needs of those whose path we cross without debate or even thought, we are on the right path. It just becomes instinctive, something we do as naturally and genuinely as praying — or breathing. ‘Alms’-givers reflexively respond to “the least of these” in the Kingdom of God on Earth.

“You cannot serve God and wealth.”

6¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21 ⁹

Jesus’s first phrase — *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth”* — is clear. “Not means not.”

In Matthew ‘store up’ implies putting aside for another use, like Joseph ‘laid up’ the excess food from the plentiful harvests in Egypt to feed the people when famine came. Joseph used the plenty (the ‘treasure’) to give security to the people (not himself) for the glory of God.

Perhaps we can read this phrase like this, “Do not store up stuff (money, material things) selfishly to benefit yourself.” This requires sacrificial giving.

Jesus then said — *“but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”* So far, we have already discussed fifteen specific ways in the Sermon on the Mount to ‘store up for yourselves treasures in heaven’ with more still to come.

Jesus expects His followers to follow His Words and example. He used the Sermon on the Mount to tell the crowd listening how He expects them to live their lives. And through the Gospel of Jesus, He teaches the same for His followers today.

Living this way connects your heart to heaven, giving you an eternal perspective. It also blesses you while living on Earth as Proverbs 11:25 NKJV says, *“The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself.”*

⁹ Other version found at Luke 12:33-34.

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6²⁴“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.”

Matthew 6:24 ¹⁰

Jesus makes a practical observation that faces all of us — dealing with two opposing thoughts and resolving them by seeking the one that is righteous before God. Jesus’s followers would need to have one driving thought — God — there could be no other.

It is a question of spiritual priority. Remember the climax of the rich young ruler story in Matthew 19:22, “*When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.*”

Jesus used the word ‘treasures’ earlier but chooses a different word, ‘wealth’ here. The word used in the Koine Greek was μαμωνᾶ (mamōna), which was transliterated into English as mammon. Its original meaning was ‘idol’ in the context of ‘idol of riches.’

This verse would be better understood by inserting ‘idol of’ before the word ‘wealth,’ as in ‘idol of’ wealth, or money or mammon.

The use of the word ‘idol’ frames what Jesus said about two opposing thoughts more powerfully — *You cannot serve God and ‘worship an idol of’ wealth.*

Jesus was serious about those who desired wealth for wealth’s sake. This was greed, and in hundreds of verses throughout the Old and New Testaments it is made clear that greed grieves God and Jesus.

This is not to say that Jesus objected to having earthly wealth if it was acquired the righteous way, and it is distributed remembering the teachings about providing for the poor and the disadvantaged, sick, and abandoned by society.

¹⁰ Other version found at Luke 6:13.

For example, the extreme concentration of wealth, separated from the righteousness of God, produces very few winners (rich) and tens of thousands of losers (poor). While the Bible speaks forcefully against this system, human greed is a powerful force.

As followers, especially in America, we must think deeply about the motivation for greed, examine ourselves to see if we are greedy (without being aware) and, if so, repent.

“So do not worry about tomorrow...”

Jesus shares a variety of illustrations of the concept of worrying over lesser things that we cannot control but builds anxiety one small worry at-a-time until we are overcome with feelings of worry.

6 ²⁵ “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? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you — you of little faith?

Matthew 6:25-30 ¹¹

What Jesus suggests for His followers may sound glibly like “Don’t Worry. Be Happy.” But He backs this teaching up in many other places in the Gospel of Jesus.

¹¹ Other version found at Luke 12:22-28.

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6³¹“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³²For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

Matthew 6:31-34 ¹²

The best example is when Jesus first appeared to His disciples after His resurrection. Those gathered were confused and afraid. Into that setting Jesus stepped and John 20:19 records His first words to them.

20¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” John 20:19 ¹³

“Peace be with you.” This was far more than a typical greeting; it was precisely on-point for the situation. Jesus likely spoke in Hebrew שָׁלוֹם לָכֶם, Shalom aleichem (*shah'-low-ah-lay'-kim*), then translated into Koine Greek as Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν (*eye'-ray-ney heh'-meen*), then in Latin as PAX VOBISCUM (*packs'-woe-bis'-come'*). All with the same meaning passed to us as *‘Peace be with you.’*

In John 14:27, Jesus summed up the same thought.

14²⁷“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” John 14:27 ¹⁴

12 Other version found at 12:29-32.

13 Additional scriptural background found at John 20:19-23.

14 Additional scriptural background found at John 20:24-29.

There are at least three types of 'peace' that Jesus leaves with us. *One is the peace of eternity with Him through the Gospel of the Christ.*

Another is the peace of knowing you have, in your life, done all you can to follow Jesus in building the Kingdom of God on Earth. Proverbs 3:27-28 describes the nature of those striving for 'treasures on earth.'

3²⁷ Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. 28 Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it" — when you have it with you. Proverbs 3:27-28

This is a peace that is fulfilling, of knowing your mind is at peace, and that you have brought peace to others faced with fear, confusion, and longing. The words of Paul, from 2 Timothy 4:7, echo this peace, *"I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith."*

And a third type of peace is contentment. The world's peace is based on circumstances. Jesus's peace is based on a trusting, close relationship with Him. In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul writes of this.

4⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7

My personal experience is that achieving these kinds of peace is easier said than done. But if we can believe that Jesus, the Christ, died and rose from the dead to secure our eternal salvation — it seems to me that believing Jesus offers His followers peace of mind as we live for Him in His Kingdom of God on Earth makes all the sense in the world.

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“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you...”

7¹² “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. Matthew 7:12 ¹⁵

This single verse is so simple and familiar we too often let it go by without giving it the import it deserves coming from the mouth of Jesus.

In this, Jesus echoed what God said about ‘the law’ in Leviticus 19:18b which begins with *‘The LORD said to Moses...’* and is followed by a series of commands for the people. The second part of the verse says, *‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.’* So, from the beginning of ‘the law,’ how we treat others is important to God, and to Jesus.

Note that this is a ‘positive’ command — ‘do this because it is right and righteous’ which means we don’t get to stand by and do nothing.

It’s like seeing a car wreck — Jesus says doing nothing is not an option. Or someone drops dead in public at your feet — Jesus says doing nothing is not an option. Or seeing a child hungry or sick or at risk — Jesus says doing nothing is not an option.

In any situation where we can bring the help that, I hope, would be given to me in their situation — Jesus says doing nothing is not an option.

“Beware of false prophets...”

7¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Matthew 7:15-16 ¹⁶

False prophets are not new. A ‘false prophet’ uses words that attract people who search for relief from real or perceived oppression. Even Jesus was accused of being a ‘false prophet,’ and to many of the religious leaders of the day, He was because in their minds, Jesus was talking and teaching against the accepted religious order.

15 Other version found at Luke 6:31.

16 Other versions found at Matthew 12:33-35 & Luke 6:43-45.

Here Jesus gives a brief and compelling way to determine if a 'false prophet' is indeed false. Don't listen to what they say, watch and see what they do.

The followers of Jesus can talk about the Gospel of Jesus all the time, to many people — but if they don't 'bear good fruit' with their lives then their talk is just that, talk.

If 'false prophets' are false, the fruit they produce will be false. We see this time and again with claims that are 'too good to be true' whether it's a preacher or a president. Jesus isn't a 'false prophet' not just because He is the Son of God, but because what He said, and did has been proven to be good fruit from the best possible tree.

This is why Jesus is so concerned in the Sermon on the Mount that His followers be true to what He says for us to do. If we reflect Jesus in our lives — be like Jesus — our fruit, too, will be good.

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock."

7 ²⁴ "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.

7 ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

Matthew 7:24, 26 ¹⁷

Jesus closes the Sermon on the Mount with these verses, repeating a common theme throughout His teaching, "If you have ears, listen." Then adding "act on them." 'Hear and act.'

Those who 'hear and act' are 'wise,' but what are '*these words of mine*' that the 'wise' should hear and act upon?

¹⁷ Additional scriptural background found at Matthew 7:24-27.
Other version found at Luke 6:47-49.

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Jesus tells us plainly in the Sermon on the Mount what *'these words of mine'* are, but will we take them to heart and do what they say?

It is one thing to enjoy a poem or a pre-game speech, but without applying action to what is said, it's just noise. With action, words can change how we act, think, or feel. And for Jesus, acting on *'these words of mine'* brings the Kingdom of God on Earth one step closer to fulfillment.

Also, this type of action has the added benefit of providing a solid foundation for spiritual growth. As Jesus said, *'it will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.'*

Jesus contrasts the solid, wise foundation of 'rock' with the soft, foolish foundation of 'sand.' Those who hear but do not act do not have a firm foundation and will crumble when troubles come their way. They will not grow spiritually.

Go to the beach with a three-year-old, and build a sandcastle that, when the waves come, washes away. But a castle of rocks will stand the waves, like a cairn, a Scottish Gaelic word for a memorial or direction marker that stands the test of time, showing the meaning or direction to follow.

There is power in rocks that sand cannot equal.

In these verses, 'rock' is not just a rock. In the Koine Greek it is πέτρων (petran), meaning a cliff, like the Rock of Gibraltar, not just a large rock you might sit on. And what is the cliff Jesus is referring to? The actions taken by His followers who hear and obey His words.

So, when Jesus says 'rock' in Matthew 7:18...

"And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it,"
...what does it mean?

The word 'rock' used in this verse has the same meaning as mentioned earlier (cliff, like the Rock of Gibraltar). And 'Peter' means small rock, one that can be thrown.

So, whereas many have interpreted this verse to mean ‘I will build My church upon Peter’ — what it actually means is, *‘I will build My church upon those who build their houses (lives) on the rock... who hear and do what I have commanded... who take action.’*

In saying this Jesus has given us the way to be powerful in His name — if we will hear and act upon His word.

Be Like Jesus.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says His followers are to be like Jesus and let their lives and actions reflect it. This sermon is long, complex, and open to many interpretations, especially of the various elements contained in it. Yet, what Jesus really said is simple, short, and a complete shift from the materialistic, greed-oriented, power-based religion found in many 21st century churches.

When Jesus’s followers inhabit the attributes covered in the Sermon on the Mount, they will find they become interconnected and interdependent. In short, they come together to enable each of the attributes which is, I think, the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount — to become more like Jesus.

By looking through the individual elements of the Sermon on the Mount we find His essential teaching — to yield our ego to His mission, and to be the hope, compassion, comforter, and staunch advocate for “the least of these.”

CONCLUSION.

While the Sermon on the Mount can be a philosophical discussion about right living, it is more — far more — than that. Jesus spoke with authority as the Son of God, presenting not just good ideas to be considered, but commands for how to live.

Jesus wants His Followers to love God and love others with wild, reckless abandon. It's what the world needs and we're the only ones who can make it so.

This “love that is tough” demands our very best, and the good news — what it looks like and sounds like — is written in the Gospel of Jesus.

Where do you stand?

Which of the seven Beatitudes do you find most difficult to embrace?
Why? (see pages 79-86)

Of the other eight attributes from the Sermon on the Mount, which
resonate most with you? Why? (see pages 87-100)

Let's Just Imagine!

Let's just imagine what might happen in our family, community, church, nation, and world if all believers **KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH!** helped usher in the

When people embrace their role in the Kingdom of God here on earth, their **EYES, EARS, MIND, HANDS, FEET & VOICE** will be used to reflect their faith.

They will use their **EYES** to look for needs that are unmet, and to watch over those in positions of authority.

They will use their **EARS** to listen for the cries of those in pain, and to hear and address comments that demean those in need.

They will use their **MIND** to think of ways to get involved and to question for themselves what God would have them do for Him.

They will use their **HANDS** to do what is needed, remembering that it is through their hands that Jesus touches the "least of these."

They will use their **FEET** to go where needed...overseas, across the street or into the voting booth...to bring the Kingdom of God to those in need.

They will use their **VOICE** to speak up and out for those without a voice, and to hold those with power accountable to remember "the least of these" when making decisions.



**Wouldn't it be lovely to live
in a world like that!?!**

Charles Stuart

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