

# **4 - Galilean Ministry: Sermon on the Mount**

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# nt 48: Part 1 – Ezekiel 36

## The Return from Exile

*Read carefully Ezekiel 36*

- 1 - Ezekiel 36:1-15 The mountains of Israel were given advance notice
- 2 - Ezekiel 36:16-24 The Lord will sanctify his own Name among the nations
- 3 - Ezekiel 36:25-32 What the return from Exile would mean for Israel
- 4 - Ezekiel 36:33-36 The implications for the earth: new creation
- 5 - Ezekiel 36:37-38 The Shepherd-God and his flocks

### 1- Ezekiel 36:1-15 The mountains of Israel were given advance notice

The first focus of this chapter is the locality of Israel. Ezekiel was directed to prophesy to the mountains, the hills and the watercourses and the valleys [4]. As a geographical place, given to the people of Israel, the land had known times when the common life it had shared with Israel was full. As God's appointed place for them, it was now bereaved of its people [12] and had been taken over by the remnant of the pagan nations. These pagan nations had made it desolate and bereft [3]; they had swarmed over it and swallowed up the land.

The pagan nations were also aware that they had taken over the Lord's high places [2]. The mountains had been mocked by these occupiers and their derision had stirred up the Lord's jealousy. Foremost in the Lord's attention among the surrounding occupiers was Edom [5]. Having come down from their lofty, mountainous position in the south, after the fall of Jerusalem, the Edomites had appropriated Israel's land for itself. The Lord had spoken against these nations, and Edom in particular, through Ezekiel [chapter 35] as well as the prophet Obadiah.

The Lord saw the mountains as having born the shame of being overrun by heathen nations [6] and He had decided that the heathen nations would bear the shame [7]. By contrast, the mountains were promised that they would be inhabited again by the house of Israel. As the people returned the mountains would be worked and tilled again; they would become productive [8-9], and cities would be rebuilt on them. They would excel even their former estate and know that God was their God [11].

Once again the mountains would know afresh what it was like to be

possessed by the people God had ordained should be there. The land would no longer be bereaved of its people [Obadiah 17]. And, what is more, the taunt that the nations had said about the land, that it was the bereaver of its people would be no more. The land was promised it would not be a reproach the heathen could mock, nor would it stumble its people again [14-15].

## 2 - Ezekiel 36:16-24 The Lord will sanctify his own Name among the nations

Israel had defiled the land in which they lived. They had shed blood onto the land's surface [Genesis 4.10] and they had worshipped idols upon it [16-18]. This had led to the judgment of God in sending them into exile among the nations [19].

The nations among whom the Israelites came, knew that the judgment of their God was upon them. And so Israel, simply by being in exile, profaned the Name of the Lord among the pagan nations. God's Name had been dishonoured by his people; because His treatment of them had made it clear to the people's round about that Israel was under His discipline; they had not kept covenant with Him [20-21].

The Lord wanted Israel to know, through Ezekiel, that His motive for bringing them back into their land was His jealousy for His own Name. He was setting out to sanctify His Name before the nations. For by bringing them back into their own land [24] God would make clear that the covenant between Him and his people was still operative, it was continuing through his gracious salvation of them. He had not abandoned them, even if they had abandoned his ways; in this way His Name would be sanctified among the nations.

## 3 - Ezekiel 36.25-32 What the return from Exile would mean for Israel

There were some clear promises of God concerning the return from Exile.

[1] Israel would be *taken* from among the nations, *gathered* up from all the nations and *brought* back into her own land [24].

[2] Israel would be *cleansed* from her defilement, from her idols [25]; this cleansing is said to be her "salvation" [29].

[3] Israel would be *given a new heart* [26a]; whereas her heart had been hard and stony, she would receive a new, soft, fleshy heart [26b].

[4] God would *put within Israel a new spirit* [26a]. The effect of this new spirit would be that Israel would be caused to walk in God's statutes, keep his

judgments and do them [27].

[5] In returning to dwell in the land *Israel would know* the relating to God that she had of old: God would be their God and they would be his people [28]; they would know covenant relationship in its fullness.

[6] They *would know* the return to fertile farming, and the famine of the exile will be broken for them [29-30] and the nations will not mock them concerning the famine anymore.

[7] They will have a true sense of remorse about their past deeds. They will come to loathe what they have done [31]. They shall have a *share of the Lord's loathing* about their own abominations and wickedness.

[8] In knowing the shared perspective of God - that He did all this for the sake of his holy Name – works in Israel an experience of being ashamed and confounded [32]. They are returned in a way that leaves them aware of the life they have is one of grace while they know their own shame about their past deeds.

All of the active verbs above show clearly the work of the Lord for Israel. Salvation and return is a matter of undeserved grace. The changes that are evidenced within the life of Israel are those worked by the provisions and the renovation of God. What she is drawn back to is the shared life with the covenant God she knows.

## 4 - Ezekiel 36:33-36 The implications for the earth: new creation

As Israel returns to her God and lives the shared life with Him, we learn that waste places are builded, the land is tilled and the desolation passes away [33-34].

The observers who pass by make the comparison between what was desolate before is now like the Garden of Eden. We are now taken back much further than the geographical exile of Israel. We have come to a re-creation which is obvious to all the inhabitants of the earth – something world wide is in view. We are drawn back to consider creation as it was applicable to all men and women.

In this way, Israel's return from exile is a pre-cursor to the new creation of the world. The nations around about are aware that this is the fulfillment of what the Lord has spoken.

## 5 - Ezekiel 36:37-38 The Shepherd-God and his flocks

Previously, God had made it clear that, because of the idolatry and unfaithfulness of Israel, He would not be inquired of by them [Ezekiel 14.3-11; 20.3]; they could not approach and ask Him things.

Now, foreshadowing the time when Israel will return from Exile, there is a deep desire by God to be asked things by His people [37] pertaining the promises that He has made to them. All the waste cities of the exile will be filled with flocks of men and women, just as formerly, at the time of the sacrifices in Jerusalem, there were many flocks of sheep gathered together for the sacrificial offerings. So here, God foreshadowed the cities as filled with men and women, who have come to have their place in the cities of their great Shepherd [38].

# nt 48 Part 2 – Jeremiah 31

## The new Covenant

*Read carefully Jeremiah 30-31*

1- Jeremiah 30 The promise of return from the exile.

2 – Jeremiah 31:1-18 The promise of return and hope for the future.

3 – Jeremiah 31:18-20 Grief of Ephraim [Israel] over their sin.

4 – Jeremiah 31:21-26 The return of the virgin woman.

5 – Jeremiah 31:27-30 Building and planting under a new covenant

6 – Jeremiah 31:31-37 The new covenant.

7 – Jeremiah 31:38-40 The city of Zion will be rebuilt.

## 1- Jeremiah 30: The promise of return from the exile

The Lord made a clear promise through the prophet Jeremiah that He would restore the fortunes of Israel and Judah and bring them back to their land, the land He gave to their forefathers [30.3].

From the period of the exile - "Jacob's distress" [30.7] – Israel was promised a release, a salvation, from the bondage to the strangers who had made them slaves [30.8-9] so that they could then serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom God would raise up for them at the time of the "latter days" [30.24].

The Lord would return them to their land out of their captivity. Yet it was

true that God had punished them [11]. Israel is pictured as a wounded person, with an incurable sore, and although forgotten by her lovers, it was because her wickedness was great that all these things had befallen her. Nevertheless she will be restored to health, so that the boast of the nations that Israel had been cast off by the Lord would be shown to be not true [15-17].

A time of happiness, renewal and rebuilding of their own cities was promised [18]; her oppressors would be punished and she would find that her ruler would come forth from her own company [21]. God himself would open up a way for this ruler to approach Him. They would be God's people as He was their God.

All this would be accomplished by the "fierce intent of God's heart" – He would bring it to pass [23-24].

## 2 – Jeremiah 31:1-18 The promise of return and hope for the future.

A description of Israel's relations with their covenant God is expressed through the use of tender pictures; Israel is portrayed as a man who went to find rest and found grace in the wilderness [2], as a virgin bride of God [4], as God's own remnant [7] and as Ephraim, God's first born [9] - with its allusion to the Exodus - and as Jacob who has been ransomed [11]. And now, at the time of the return from the exile, God promised them celebration, dancing and joy [1-14].

The sadness of the time of the conquering of Jerusalem and the carrying off of the people into exile is delineated through the sadness of Rachel, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin. At the time of her death in giving birth to Benjamin, Rachel had wanted to name him Ben-Oni [= son of my sorrow], but his father, Jacob, called him Benjamin [= son of my right hand]. The conquest and exile of Israel was registered in Israel as a sadness that refused to be comforted [15]. The promise of the Lord through Jeremiah was that the time had come to restrain this weeping and tears, and that the sons of Rachel would return to their own territory [16-17]. There is hope for the future.

## 3 – Jeremiah 31.18-20 Grief of Ephraim [Israel] over their sin.

The Lord is pictured as listening to the grief of Israel [Ephraim] over its sin [18]; its rebellion in breaking away and subsequent descent into idolatry. These tribes of the northern kingdom had fallen into their own exile and dispersion under the Assyrians in 723, at the fall of their capital Samaria.

Ephraim, in humiliation, pleads with the One who is its "Lord and my

God" that Israel might be brought back so that they might be restored. Ephraim is pictured as a young calf, needing discipline, training and instruction. He has, in his exile, born the reproach of his youth.

The Lord reminds Ephraim that He had always thought of him as his dear son, as his delightful child [20], even though He has spoken against him. God spoke of how He yearned for Ephraim and would have mercy upon him.

As we note in other prophets, the return from exile envisaged here applies to both the Northern kingdom and of the Southern Kingdom. The new covenant to be enacted for the people of God includes both of the kingdoms that had divided from each other at the death of Solomon [27,31].

#### 4 – Jeremiah 31:21-26 The return of the virgin woman.

The Lord, through Jeremiah, exhorts Israel as a faithless wandering daughter to pay attention to the way she went out, and, being aware of the route that was used to go out, to now use it to return to her cities.

The new thing that God is said to be doing in this returning of Israel to her land is that "a woman shall encompass a man". How is this to be understood?

Some have taken it to mean that "through a woman, there will be the protection of a man". But the text may be read " a woman shall go about [*seeking*] a man" {NIV1973 margin}. If this latter is the way to read it, then the "new thing" would be that, contrary to the normal way of God's people and the local culture, where a man set off to find a wife for himself; here is the picture of a virgin woman going on a journey to seek out a man for herself. If we read it that way, then the new thing is that Israel, about to come under a new covenant, and journeying along the highway by which she had come out, is now returning to her "man", to her father [God] as a virgin backsliding daughter, to be a wife in a fresh way and under new renovating circumstances.

It is a mixed metaphor, to be sure. We have a "daughter", which casts the Lord as a Father who is welcoming back a chastised daughter. We also have a woman, seeking a man, in the sense that she looks like she is taking an initiative in her repentant return [as a daughter] in going out on the highway to come back to her "husband" who is her Lord. Both images are used of Israel in relation to God in the Old Testament.

Refreshment for the inhabitants of Judah will be found in the life that ensues as the exiles return. Old happy times and old ways of satisfied living will return [23-26].

## 5 – Jeremiah 31:27-30 Building and planting under a new covenant.

God promised through Jeremiah that there were “Days coming” when He would reverse his former uprooting of their houses and established order, the destruction and disaster that He had wreaked on them. He would now begin to watch over them, to build and to plant [27-28].

This new state of affairs would bring to an end the younger generation’s great objection to their life in exile, that it was their parents who had sinned – “eaten sour grapes” - and that they, the new generation, had tasted the results of their parents sins – “the children’s teeth had been set on edge”. The new state of affairs would bring about personal accountability directly, every person’s actions will have the effect on their life that is appropriate to them personally.

This has to do with the direct knowledge of the Lord which will be personally available to each person under the new covenant.

## 6 – Jeremiah 31:31-37 The new covenant.

Future to the time of Jeremiah’s prophecy, God declared that He would make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

This new covenant is described in the following way; it:

[1] Is with the whole of his covenant people [See point 3 above].

[2] Is unlike the covenant that was enacted at the Exodus [“their fathers in Egypt”]. Notice that this does not refer back to Abraham. What is referred to here is the Mosaic covenant; it was broken by Israel, even though God was a husband to them. The picture of the covenant under Moses is a marriage arrangement, where the adulterous wife has broken covenant with her faithful husband. It is typified by being an arrangement set by ‘external’ law as the following contrast indicates.

[3] Involves the law of the Lord being placed by Him within his people. In contrast to an ‘external’ writing of law, this placement will be an ‘inner’ writing of the law, which makes it an affair of the inner heart; it refers to inward personal knowing of the mind of God in relation to his people. [See Isaiah 59.21].

[4] Is fundamentally relational. The new covenant aims at an exchange of life where the people of God know that He is their God as they know that they are his people. It cements a firm commitment to one another over an experience of shared life together.

[5] conveys an experience of God that is existential and real for each person. There will be know need for mediatorial human helpers to get to know God. Each person will be in contact with God directly and needs not be taught

by other human beings – they are taught directly by God himself.

[6] Is founded upon a personal and communal knowledge of forgiveness of sins. In respect of relating to God the past is not taken into account. The guilt of the past does not control the relating of the present.

[7] Is a covenant under which - as surely as God maintains the fixed natural order that He has created - Israel is assured that this new covenant would never involve God in abandoning Israel as a nation before Him on the basis of their misdeeds.

## 7 – Jeremiah 31:38-40 The city of Zion will be rebuilt.

The future promise of the Lord was that the city of Zion would be rebuilt. The whole Kidron valley that had been defiled by the dead bodies that had filled it at the conquest and time of the exile, would be holy to the Lord. The Lord promised that it would not be plucked up or overthrown anymore.

# nt 48:part 3 –

## Underlying Old Testament themes: righteousness; sons relating to a Father.

### The post-Exilic setting of the Context of the Sermon

*Read about God's saving righteousness in Isaiah 41.2 of Cyrus; 41.10d; 42.6, 45.13 of Cyrus; 45.19de, 21; 46.12-13; 51.6-8; 56.1; 59.15b-20; 63.1-2; Romans 1.17;3.21-27*

1- Recurring themes in Matthew 5-7

2 – God's saving righteousness.

3 – Faith: the 'beginning response' to God's saving righteousness.

4 – Our practice of righteousness.

4 – "Sons" in relation to their heavenly "Father"; and so having "brothers"

5 – A Lord who speaks of obedience to "my Father" and "your Father".

## 1- Recurring themes in Matthew 5-7

We have prepared for the Sermon on the Mount [*nt 48Pt1, nt 48Pt2*] by noticing the promises of God to Israel concerning their return from the Exile into Babylon, including also the earlier Exile of Jewish people of the Northern Kingdom in 723BC. We have concentrated on the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Both prophets, we have seen, refer to an accompanying awareness of their sins at the time of their deliverance from the exile that finds expression in repentance. At the time of John the Baptist's ministry this repentance was preached as a preparation for Jesus' subsequent ministry to Israel. John's ministry, as we have seen, found a ready response in Israel; John was popular and well attended by the common people.

Throughout the section of Matthew 5-7, there are a number of exilic prophetic themes that repeat. And since these themes dominate the section it is good to look carefully at what they presuppose. For, in this way we gain the context for the overall teaching of Jesus, before we try to look at the parts.

Indeed, these themes help us to understand the hard parts, because they give us a way to approach them, as not disconnected from the major themes of Jesus' teaching in other parts of the Gospel as well.

## 2 – God's saving righteousness.

God's character is right and true. When He acts, Who He is – His Being - finds its outward expression. The righteousness of God is practically expressed as He takes the initiative in the exchanges that take place between Him and his covenant people, Israel. In the extended history of Israel's dealings with the Lord, recorded in the Old Testament, we see that the Lord is always reliable and consistent in His way of initiating gracious promises and care for Israel.

Throughout their life together, over a long period of time and in practical ways, Israel always finds God to be right and true. His "righteousness" then, is seen in relation to his people, through what He does for them. It is the way He conducts himself in their joint relationship, it is his practical expression of this facet of His character.

By contrast, Israel's track record in her responses to His righteousness - what we might call her answering "righteousness", her practical expression – is abysmal. She is a wayward nation who leaves her covenant relationship and goes off after other gods, there is injustice in her internal relations with one another: justice and righteousness do not prevail. God's response to her response to Him is that He disciplined her, sent her into slavery at the time of the Judges,

and into exile, at the time of the conquest of Samaria in 723 BC and also at the conquest of Jerusalem in 598 BC.

What was coming to Israel through Jesus was the fulfillment of Isaiah's understanding of how the righteousness of God would be the salvation of Israel [Isaiah 41.2 of Cyrus; 41.10d; 42.6, 45.13 of Cyrus; 45.19de, 21; 46.12-13; 51.6-8; 56.1; 59.15b-20; 63.1-2]. It was this idea that was behind the reply of Jesus to John the Baptist when he encouraged John to go on and baptize him so as to "fulfill all righteousness". Jesus was seeing that God was reaching out, in a gracious, saving initiative to Israel through his own ministry. A ministry into which Jesus was plunged at his baptism.

In this Sermon on the Mount we are reading, this theme of God's righteousness and the responding righteousness of His people is foundational to what Jesus said. We notice the blessing of the kingdom of God for those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness" [5.6, Isaiah 51.1]. Whether we should take this to mean a deep desire for God's saving righteousness, or that they might have such a righteousness manifesting in their own life, is made clearer in the light of what is written below.

In practice, men and women were to not worry about the provisions of life [6.25-31]; that was the mark of the Gentiles. Jewish folks, those who Jesus was addressing in his audience here, were to understand that their God knew their needs. Rather, they were to seek first his kingdom – His outgoing rule of them - and his righteousness and all these other needs would be provided for them [6.32]. That is, as their first priority, they needed to be attending to what God was initiating towards them; how He was expressing his covenant care of them. If they attended to His "righteousness" – as it went out towards them - then they would be in the position to make a response to Him.

In the light of the Lord's teaching in this Sermon, we are not surprised to encounter this theme in Paul's letter to the Romans, where he states that the Gospel is a revelation of God's righteousness [Romans 1.17]. He develops throughout the letter how God has taken a gracious initiative in manifesting his righteousness in the setting forth of Jesus to be a propitiation for sinful mankind; a propitiation in his blood for all those who believe. The believers are those who see, and so comprehend, this manifestation of God's righteousness [Romans 3.21-27].

### 3 – Faith: the 'beginning response' to God's saving righteousness.

Our readings in the Gospels so far have shown us that, in every place where the rule of God –the kingdom of God/heaven – touched the life of an

individual, the Gospel writers have drawn our attention to that persons' trust in the word of Jesus. Indeed, Jesus had, on more than one occasion, acknowledged that this "faith", or trust, in his word had evoked the 'work' that followed in the life of the person.

So we see that faith in the person of Jesus, or specifically in the words that He spoke, was, in each case, the first and immediate response of an individual to the initiative of the saving righteousness of God as it was being expressed through Jesus.

And we would not be far wrong if we thought of this initial response of faith to Jesus as being received/recognised by God as the appropriate response to his own righteousness as it reached out to them through His Son.

So, in the covenant setting of initiative and response, the faith of the individual, being the appropriate response to God's righteousness, evoked a deep pleasure in God and was reckoned to them as righteousness. That is, as the righteousness of God went out to them in grace, their trusting acceptance of the truth of His word was the reciprocal response drawn from them by God's own actions towards them. In such a context this response was their "righteousness" for it was drawn from them and answered to God's own out-going righteousness.

This perspective underlay the attitude of Jesus as He responded to people's faith in Him. It found expression also in the understanding which Paul, the apostle, echoed in Romans 4, where he noticed such an appropriate response in Abraham who "believed God". Such trust, said Paul, God "reckoned to him as righteousness" [Romans 4.3].

#### 4 – Our practice of righteousness.

Isaiah spoke of a reciprocal relationship established between Israel and the righteous Lord who promised to save her. Israel, as a result of the salvation that would be brought to her by God's righteousness, was intended to become a people who were "oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that He may be glorified" [Isaiah 61.3ef]. The coming righteousness of Jerusalem would see her, among the nations, glorified and married to her God [Isaiah 62.1-5]. This was in sharp contrast to how it was before, when Israel, having been delivered by God into the power of their sins [Isaiah 64.6-7], had cried for mercy because her "righteous deeds were like a filthy garment".

In the light of the covenant context we have considered above, it won't surprise us that, in the Sermon on the Mount, there was a relational response required of God's covenant people whom Jesus was addressing. The section 5.20-38 is an exposition of the how, and in what way, the disciples of Jesus must understand that their "righteousness" – their response in the covenant exchange

between God and themselves. It must surpass that of the “scribes and the Pharisees” if they were to enter into the kingdom of God - the gracious rule of God that had come through Jesus.

This practical righteousness was shown to be not a superficial response to the letter of the law [Torah], but was a matter centralized in the inner heart of the disciple who had come to know God as father.

Further, Jesus issued warnings [6.1-18] about how the scribes and Pharisees practiced their righteousness – their covenantal response to God. Such practice was not to be copied as a good example. The scribes and Pharisees practice so that they may be seen by men and women. That is, while they were doing religious actions ostensibly to the Lord; they really had their eye on what others thought of them. The practice of their righteousness, said Jesus, had a reward – people thought highly of them; but it had no reward from God, it was simply not regarded by Him.

By contrast, when Jesus disciples were to “practice their righteousness” they were to be concentrating upon the Lord only. This was because their relationship was holy, exclusive and to be intensely focused on Him. Their almsgiving, prayer and fasting were to be directed to Him alone – and therefore, in regard to possible onlookers, must be done secretly. It was not to be defiled by the compromising motive of what others might think. “He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart ...his praise is not from men, but from God” [Romans 2.29].

Further, there was a great joy and blessing for the disciples of the Lord who found themselves subject to persecution “for righteousness’ sake” [5.10-12]; persecuted, insulted, and falsely accused of evil, said Jesus, “on account of Me”. This statement can only mean that Jesus saw himself as the embodiment of the righteousness of God – the saving initiative that God had provided; who when believed on by some, those folks found themselves persecuted by those who did not trust in His word.

## 5 – “Sons” in relation to their “ heavenly Father”; and so having “brothers”

We have noticed already, in our reading of Jeremiah 31, that when the new covenant arrived, it would lead to each person knowing the Lord for themselves. The sense of intimate relation to God was fundamental to what God had promised in Jeremiah.

Underlying all the teaching of Jesus presented in the Sermon on the Mount, was an assumption that there was already known a way of relating to God as Father from the position of liberty found in being a son. The blessing of

the kingdom was pre-eminently in being called “sons of God” [5.9]. While, as we read, we are noticing the underlying themes of Paul, we recall that he too, emphasized the freedom of sons who related to their father within a secure and accepted relationship. This is the liberty of close access and personal exchange throughout life [Romans 5.1-2, 8.14-17; Galatians 3.26-5.1].

This “sonship” theme underlies the Sermon on the Mount. The life of discipleship under Jesus was a call, while on the earth, to live a life which would be obvious in its good works, and so to bring glory to “your Father” who is in heaven [5.15].

Such sons would find that, in the community of the Father’s family, they are found living alongside “brothers” who they need to live with, constantly maintaining reconciliation [5.24] as a pre-requisite of also expressing their worship of their Father.

These sons must go beyond the old teaching of loving their neighbour and hating your enemy. Like their Father who cares for all, whether righteous or unrighteous, so the sons must pray for their enemies and do good to those who hate them so that they may be “sons” of their “Father” in practice [5.45].

They were brothers who were not judge one another. Each was to be aware of the log in his own eye. Any correction of another was only possible while the compromised position of oneself was taken into account and accepted [7.4-5]. They knew that, of themselves, they were evil in nature [7.11].

## 6 – A Lord who speaks of obedience to “my Father” and “your Father”.

Jesus was adamant that what mattered to him was that people did not just name him “Lord” but did the will of “his Father” [7.21]. It was obedience within the relationship that mattered, not boasting before others about the relationship they were in. Jesus had a way of distinguishing Himself as the eternal Son of God who had always been in relationship with God as his Father; and who also, amongst us as Man, could be a way to the Father for others.

This sharp distinction was made by Jesus in the Gospel of John, when Jesus, finding Mary wishing to hold onto him as resurrected, made it clear that he was “ascending to My Father [*by nature as God*] and your Father [*by grace*], and My God [*under Whom I am as man*] and your God [*between Whom and you, I am the mediator*]” [John 20.17].

# nt 48Pt 4 – Matthew 5.1-2

## The setting of the Context of the Sermon

*Read carefully Luke 6.20; Exodus 24.7-18*

48-1 Structure of Matthew's Gospel

48-2 Teaching directed to the disciples, a crowd attending

48-3 The covenant background in Exodus

48-4 The contrast with the background in Exodus

48-5 The kernel of the new community

48-6 "Except your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes Pharisees..."

### 48-1 Structure of Matthew's Gospel

Of all our Gospel writers, Matthew has paid the most attention to the order in which he presents things. His plan and structure are clear to see, and in seeking to understand the Gospel to approach it through the structural outline which the writer has obviously imposed. We could state it in the rough outline in the following way:

[1] Matthew has presented *five sections of teaching* of Jesus interspersed with the narrative of the events. He has linked these five teaching segments with formulae. He often says, "And when Jesus finished these sayings..." [7.28-29,11.1,13.53,19.1,26.1.]

Sometimes Matthew presents things in what is technically called a *chiasmus*. It takes the form of a,b;b,a. See 13.15 for an example. He even follows this way of doing things in the presentation of the five segments of the teaching.

1 - He deals with Jesus' birth.

5-7 - the first section of teaching, the entry to the kingdom [a]

10 - the sending of the apostles [b]

13 - the central point of the teaching

18 - the reception of the apostles who have been sent

23-25 - the entry to the kingdom, waiting for the kingdom [b]

28 - the rebirth or the resurrection [a]

[2] He alternates these teaching sections with *narrative portions*

8-9 Jesus' miracles of healing

11-12 The rejection of John the Baptist and also of Jesus by the

Jews

14-17 Miracles more, controversy with Pharisees, Peter's confession and the Transfiguration

19-22 The journey of Jesus and the disciples to Jerusalem

26-28 The last days - the arrest and trial, crucifixion, resurrection final appearances

[3] Sometimes Matthew presents things in 3's, 5's, and 7's.

[4] Matthew's passion narratives agree closely with Mark and Luke.

[5] Matthew is very concise in comparison to Mark. It is helpful to compare between the two, say, at the death of John Baptist Matt 14.3-12 as compared with Mark 6.7-29. See also the healing of the epileptic boy Matt 17.14-21 compared with Mark 9.14-29.

*As to the text:* what are the sources for this section of teaching? In the more than 100 verses here, half of them have parallels in Luke, a quarter of them being found in Luke 6 in the "Sermon on the Plain" - does this suggest a common source to Matthew and Luke? Of the remaining fifty verses, some come from a source peculiar to Matthew, sometimes called by the scholars, the "M" source. Coming from "M" would be 5.19ff, 21-22,27ff, 33-37, 38-41, 6.1-8,16-18.

## 48-2 Teaching directed to the disciples, a crowd attending

Matthew opens this first Teaching section – what is called the Sermon on the Mount – by stating that when Jesus saw the crowds he went up onto the side of a mountain and sat down.

His disciples came to Him and he taught them. Is Jesus withdrawing from the crowds to be with the disciples alone? Or are the crowds within earshot of what Jesus taught? It is not clear, although Luke's sermon on the Plain [Luke 6.17-49] has a very diverse crowd from all over the Galilean area but Luke, as does Matthew, has Jesus looking at the disciples as he says these things [Luke 6.20]. So perhaps we are right to see Jesus' intention as, while directing his attention at the disciples, allows the crowd to hear what he has to say.

This setting is instructive in its own way. The teaching of Jesus is not exclusive of the rest of the people of Israel, for he came for them. The crowd, if they will listen, then they can. For they are found where God's Messiah is expressing the kingdom, that is their moment whether they appreciate it or not. There are matters that Jesus speaks to the disciples about which are not broadcast; that is true, but these have to do with an unfolding revelation of Father to them during the time of Jesus' earthly ministry.

Later, when all has been done in a public way, then there are no secret Christian teachings – no Gnostic material for the initiated only. Everything is ‘out there’ – open for anyone to read and reflect upon. Whether they ‘get it’ or not is not because the church hides something from the outsider; it has to do with the operation of the Holy Spirit upon them, just as it was the work of the Father, through the Spirit, during Jesus’ earthly presence.

## 48-3 The covenant background in Exodus

By the fact that Jesus delivered this teaching on a mountainside, Matthew wanted the reader to understand that the teaching of Jesus corresponded to the Law in the Old Testament - but not in the way that it is simply a new law.

The Christian converts, as they will be instructed by Matthews’ Gospel, would make the contrasts of the two mountain-teachings and draw the clear conclusion. For they know themselves to be justified apart from the Law, and yet called to a deeper, more penetrating way of keeping God’s word and commandment. It is a shift to the keeping of God’s law as a heart matter – an inner change has been worked on the Christian. This change makes for a very different orientation to the law of God, whether that law is found as it was expressed under the old covenant-operation or the new.

Perhaps setting of the covenant of Exodus 24.7ff is the key; where the words of the covenant are the words of the Law. The people, sprinkled with blood promise to do them. Jesus, having come to make the New Covenant in his blood [26.28] is seeing his blood as corresponding to the blood of the oxen poured on the people, so his words here are the contrast to the words of the covenant then. For, in the teaching that follows there is a strong contrast between the words of the Law and the words of Jesus.

There is really only one covenant of God with his people. So, when we speak of the contrasts existing between the new covenant and the old covenant, we are using a shorthand way of comparing and contrasting what God has done among his people prior to the coming of Christ, with what He has done for us in Christ.

So, when Jeremiah speaks of God bringing in a new covenant [Jeremiah 31.31] he makes its “newness” to be defined - “not like the old...” - by its comparison with the covenant at Sinai, which the Israelites “broke”. In this way, the old and the new are two occasions where the “covenanting God” of Israel makes changes to match the ever-moving relationship that He has with his people, according to his merciful provision for their needs.

We are really contrasting two ways of working; two economies, as the New Testament expresses it. So when the apostle Paul speaks of a contrast of

two ministries, the apostolic ministry and that of Moses [2 Corinthians 3.6-4.1], he means two contrasting ways that God has worked in history. But the point of the “new” is that it is new relative to what prepared for it and led up to it; it is a contrast that only has power by the fact that two different economies of God can no be contrasted. The arrival of the one casts the other in an old light.

#### 48-4 The contrast with the background in Exodus

This mountain is not identified, and doesn't really need to be, for the whole inference is that as Jesus is the fulfilment of Moses, consistent with what we have seen in the Introduction, indicates that as Moses received the Law on the mountain of Sinai, so Jesus will give his teaching. The past associations, which the Old Testament setting would awaken, nevertheless makes a constant contrast to both the method of instruction and the content of what Jesus delivers.

The fact that Jesus sits to teach was usual [Matthew 13.1-2, 24.3, 26.55] and so, we have a sharp contrast to the Sinai setting that was frightening and extremely dramatic [Hebrews 12.14-28]. Within a gentle, quiet setting, Jesus gave his disciples a way of understanding the practice of the law. It is based upon a comparison of what they “have heard of old” with the “...but I say...”. They are now to hear from Jesus as their rabbi, who, unlike the scribes and the Pharisees, teaches with the authority of God.

It is really practical teaching, but because it is uttered in the climate of the prevailing teaching of the scribes, Jesus begins by informing the disciples as to *who they are*. He will do this first, so that they will be secure in themselves, before they set out to practice what he will teach. More of this as we go on.

#### 48-5 The kernel of the new community

As the disciples were called to follow Jesus, they formed a kernel of the new Israel. They were a small group of people who welcomed the Messiah, and they did so by the revelation of the Father about his Son. So we must not miss here, as they gather on the hill-side, that they are a humble, small beginning of the Israel of God that comes out of the old Israel, and is continuous with it. If Jesus came to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, then here are some sheep gathered by the great Shepherd to begin what God has promised for all.

This also meant that the work of the Saviour would be the basis of this flock being able to listen to what Jesus was saying here, and at the same time to be enabled to carry out this radical, inner righteousness that his sermon spoke about.

## 48-6 “Except your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes Pharisees...” [Matthew 5.20]

Jesus taught in this sermon that he was presuming for his own disciples, as a new community empowered by sharing his own life, that they would have a practical righteousness which would not only surpass that of the pagans around them [5.47] but also the life of the theologically educated scribes and of the pious laymen who formed the party of the Pharisees. And he did not think that they could do this of themselves – for they were sinners, in their thinking, their speaking and their doing [7.11].

Does this mean that he was burdening his listeners more than the scribes did? No, he was speaking this call to them on grounds that were revolutionary; it was an entirely new way. He, himself, was a new route to knowing God as Father, it was a new way of living because it presumed the life of new men and women. It all depended on His work for them being accomplished through his Incarnation, life, death, resurrection ascension and the sending of his Spirit into them. Let us consider this from the two facets of his two natures as they came together, without mixture, in his undivided person.

First, the Saviour has come to us as the *Word of God to man*. He has brought us the gracious good news of God, Who has done a work on our behalf in sending His Son to die for us. This He did in our place. The reconciliation that this brings about for us with God is a gift. As we have seen [*nt 48pt3-4*] Jesus is the “righteousness of God” **to us**, in that He is the gracious saving initiative of God, sent to us from the Father. He is the word of God to man, who must be received and trusted so that men and women may enter/come under - the rule/kingdom of God. Jesus is the revelation of the righteousness of God for salvation.

Second, the Saviour who has come to us is also the *word of man to God* on our behalf. He has resurrected, and ascended into heaven. He is the righteousness of God **for us**. All of his beautiful life, which was lived on the earth for our sakes and in our name, is the beautiful offering of himself to God by the Spirit.

So that, the responses we ought to have made to God but would not - and so it came to mean that we could not - He offered for us. He is our righteousness and sanctification - He has lived in our place and in our stead.

For the gift we have been given by the father is His Son. It is Jesus Himself who is our righteousness [1 John 2.1-1] and who is our sanctification [1Corinthians 1] and our redemption.

If Jesus is the righteous response of man to God on our behalf, then

we must not think of Him as giving us a righteousness as if something separate from Himself. No, it is otherwise, we can distinguish our righteousness from the righteousness of Jesus but we cannot separate the two. Jesus, in his person, is our righteousness; and this becomes actual and real in our experience through union with Christ by the Spirit.

This exchanged life is going to be the underlying basis of the life that the Sermon in the Mount describes. Keep this in mind as we read on.

## nt 49 – Matthew 5.3-12

### The blessed One: facets of his character

*Read carefully Luke 6.20-26; Exodus 24.7-18*

*49-1 The inner and outer workings of the life of the Proper Man*

*49-2 The tension of the “now” and the “not yet”*

*49-3 Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*

*49-4 Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted*

*49-5 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, they shall be satisfied*

*49-6 Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy*

*49-7 Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God*

*49-8 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God*

*49-9 “Blessed are the you when persecuted...”*

### 49-1 The inner and outer workings of the life of the Proper Man

What Jesus described was the human life that he lives, and he was anticipating that his disciples would actually share it; immediately, as they are called to be “with him” at the time of speaking, and later, by the Spirit after his Ascension.

As the Word of God took flesh in the incarnation, then he took our fallen humanity up into himself. The fact that Jesus lived the life of a proper man, by his own will, expressing his obedience to his Father, means that the human life he was laying out for us here, in the Sermon on the Mount, was a powerful

look “into” the inner workings of his own life as true man.

As Adam had found, before their rebellion, the commands of God were not burdensome, but were given to them as a blessing; so we find that the call of Jesus was/is not burdensome either. Certainly in comparison with the scribes and Pharisees, who heap up many religious burdens on people, Jesus contrasts his burden as “light” [See **nt222**].

So, at the arrival of the second Adam, we find the man who redeems us and all of creation; so we find that the “blessed” life has now been manifest before us – and we are called to share in that blessing.

## 49-2 The tension of the “now” and the “not yet”

When Jesus came he lived in a fallen and defiled world. So we should not be surprised that this blessed and holy man also experienced some very difficult things.

We have eight statements that take the form “Blessed are X for the reason Y”. In the opening and closing ones, the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup>, the Y section states that “theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. For the statements 2<sup>nd</sup> through to 7<sup>th</sup>, the Y section states that the reason for the blessed situation is that a future promise may be expected that is appropriate to the X characteristic. So, while 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> state what is present now, 2<sup>nd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> state what still lies in the future for such persons characterized by the various X factors described.

Jesus’ teaching here, as embraced by the Christian reader of any age, as it would have been by the disciples who heard it when it was first delivered, points towards a constant matter which we have to account for as Christian people. It is that we know the blessing of the kingdom in our lives as a gift that we have. The 1<sup>st</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> make that clear, the kingdom is a present possession.

For the disciples who first heard this, that was true for they were called to be with Jesus, they were called to “learn Jesus” [**nt80**]. They had been invited to take his ‘yoke’ upon them – a picture that normally took the setting of coming under the authority of a conqueror. Yet, paradoxically, as they take the yoke of their rabbi they are to learn of him; that he is meek and lowly of heart. In taking this attitude to themselves, they find rest for their souls [Jeremiah 6.16]. To be conquered by Jesus was to discover that his yoke was easy and his burden is light.

They had the kingdom in their possession because they were with the king. A fact that their opponents afterwards recognized [Acts 4.13] and knew that they could no longer just typify them as unschooled simple fishermen.

For disciples of Jesus today, we too have the kingdom – it is ours. For we have received of the Spirit of Christ Jesus, and we have “learned Christ” [Eph-

sians 40.20] and we have the Son and the Father, by the Spirit [1 John 5.12]. We have the kingdom because we are sharing – participating – in the life of God through the Spirit of Christ.

### 49-3 Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

Jesus, as the Word of God come to us as man, had laid aside His glory and taken a humble position [Philippians 2. 2-11]. In his coming to us he had taken into himself our poverty of spirit, our inward place where we are bereft before God, and have nothing of our own wealth out of which to bring to God what is his due. In standing with sinners at his baptism, Jesus had declared his mission.

What he conveyed in his teaching was that those who were sinners, bereft of any kudos or awareness that they were somebody but, who saw themselves as quite lowly and poor before God, these folks are blessed. And they could only come to know this poverty of spirit through the word of God as a gift to them.

The reason they are blessed was because the kingdom of heaven was theirs. That was their treasure; it was Jesus. As long as they had him with them, and for them before God, then they would have the rule of God being expressed through their life and work. As we have noticed above, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. They had it then, as they listened to him, because they had him.

### 49-4 Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted

As Jesus came among us it was to be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. As any righteous man, and as the prophets before him who were given God's heart about the state of Israel, there was deep mourning over the wickedness of God's people; an awareness born of a knowledge of what this does to God's own heart.

Any man who listened to him then, and anyone now, who shares in this mourning, must already know and share in the heart passions of God for his people; for we cannot know it for ourselves – it is a gift of the Word of God. And if their situation was that they were grieving over this situation then Jesus declared them blessed; they were already sharing in the inner life of God, and further, nothing was surer than there was a future promise that they would be comforted in their grief. This was the clear statement that God would set things to right. He would bring the restoration of all things, to be as they should be. To

mourn now was to have revelation that things, as they stood, were wrong. It was to share the passion of God as to how things ought to be. Jesus word was that such knowledge is a blessing; and there will be comfort to follow.

## 49-5 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, they shall be satisfied

Israel's existence, being in a covenant relation with God, was an experience of deep disturbance. For they always discovered that God was righteous, He upheld his side of the covenant responsibilities – being consistent and reliable in his love and kindness towards them.

Israel, on the other hand, was always recalcitrant, and failing to keep faithful to God in her responses to God's kindness. In regards to his law, her fleshly life kicked against it, she found that the living as God's people was constantly moulding her to be like Him, yet this involved living with constant, significant failure.

Eventually, having broken covenant God declared, through Isaiah, that his righteousness would save her [nt48Pt3-2]; He would uphold the covenant from his side and also from her side as well. This is why He sent His Son, who could, as true God and true man, make the responses for Israel that she could not. The righteousness of God, as it is in Christ Jesus, will save her. So, as we have seen, the apostle Paul will describe the gospel as a "revelation of God's righteousness" and he says that it is "the power of God to salvation".

Jesus was the blessed man – a man who wanted righteousness in our life as a man hungers for bread and thirsts for water in his bodily existence. This man is blessed; for he will be satisfied. His hunger and thirst will be satiated – filled up and answered.

"As a result of the anguish of His soul,  
He will see it and be satisfied;  
By His knowledge the Righteous One,  
My Servant, will justify many,  
As He will bear their iniquities." [Isaiah 53.11 NASV]

Jesus had the powerful satisfaction of offering his life, as a thoroughly righteous life to God through the Holy Spirit. He offered his life on our behalf and in our name. As the blessed man, when he shares his life with us we have created in us the same hunger for righteousness.

And, since Jesus' life will be transferred to us – He is our righteousness – He is our response to God. We share in his response by the Spirit. We do this by

faith in his finished work on our behalf and by the power of sharing in his resurrected life – and it satisfies the hunger he created within us.

## 49-6 Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy

Jesus came into this world not to judge the world, but the world might be saved through him [John 3.17]. Mercy is the extension to others of what they do not deserve. Whenever merciful people are participating in this facet of God's character, then they are blessed, for they shall be shown mercy. Jesus came with this merciful character.

Jesus, as he stood in our place and in his life for us, was not treated as he really deserved. He was dishonoured, defiled and rejected. But this was the mercy of God to us. For, as a righteous one who did not receive what he deserved, Jesus has become the mercy of God to us so that, through him, it works out that we are treated not as we deserve, which is to receive mercy. But we are sinners. Out of his dishonour we have found an honour and a treatment that reinstated us to what we did not deserve. It is a great exchange for our sakes.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy. This states that, in this present life right now, as those who have received mercy, it changes our character to be like him – while, at the same time, convincing us that we did not deserve this mercy – for we recognize the blessing.

To know this is to make it more certain and sure that we shall receive mercy in the future. For we know the place from which we have been granted what we did not deserve.

## 49-7 Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God

Jesus' own heart was pure and undefiled. He was not dirtied by any un-toward motive or matter. He is the blessed man who has no personal self-centred agenda, no mixture within. He is totally focused on Another, his Father. It is a holy, dedicated inner life. The blessing in Jesus' life is that he sees God – he can bear witness of what he knows. Jesus, as the resurrected Man has come to see God. He has ascended into the heavens and a new thing has taken place! A man is seeing God face-to-face.

Jesus teaching was assuring the disciples that they would participate in this blessing of seeing God. First in being with Jesus, they were seeing, handling and touching of the Word of God incarnate [1 John 1.1-4]. But there was something also in the future. We likewise, who have not seen Jesus in the flesh, have come to believe on him through the word of others and we shall see him, for we

shall be like him [we shall be changed by it] , for we shall see him as he is [1 John 3.2].

## 49-8 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God

In the person of our Lord we have a Man who is a peacemaker. He has come to reconcile us to God and has done that in his own person. As he made reconciliation, by his death for us, He declared to “son of God” with power by that resurrection out from among the dead [Romans 1.1-4]. He is our peace.

As we share in the gift of his life, given to us, by the Spirit, we too become those who live at peace with our neighbours on that basis. We pray for them, and as sons of God, with access to Him, our prayers preserve and care for our neighbours.

As spoken to the disciples, Jesus’ teaching is declaring that the peacemakers are the sort of men and women like Him. For the Son of God came to make peace between God us. So it is that those who are his disciples will have the power to live out of a reconciled life that is given them; they too, through their forgiveness of others extend the knowledge of their reconciled life out into the world. They are sons of God.

## 49-9 “Blessed are the you when persecuted...”

To his disciples Jesus knew that, if they were called to be with him, then they would share in the blessings of His blessed life, as a true man. One of those blessings is to be persecuted because of righteousness. That is, there is given to the disciples a privilege of sharing in the righteous life in the midst of a world that is not so. Then the reaction of the world will be aggressive and it will hound the disciples as it experiences the contrast of their life with its.

This is the blessing of sharing in the sufferings of Christ – a righteous man who in his life found rejection and ignominy, and had no rest from opponents to his godliness.

Strangely, as the disciples of Jesus find themselves persecuted in a hostile world, they understand that this is an astonishing privilege. It states that, in knowing the hostility of the world “on account of Me”, as Jesus had said, they are blessed in the living through it.

To be persecuted for righteousness puts the people of the new covenant into long line of historical figures – specifically the prophets who were persecuted before the time when Jesus us speaking.

The prophets were those who, in their day and time, were in possession

of the word of God for their age – they were speaking for God into the lives of their peers and contemporaries. The word of God then, as it was manifesting in their lives and times, was the possession of the kingdom of heaven.

Similarly, in hearing Jesus and following him, the disciples of Jesus were the contemporary persons of their day with the dynamic rule of God in their hands. This is so also for the later disciples, such as ourselves. For wherever the people of the new covenant are at large in the world, they are specifically there as those who possess the kingdom, the current version of the rule of God for their time.

This blessing finds its basis in the persecution that arises on account of Jesus exclusively; it does not accrue to the disciples of Jesus unless the insults and the persecution have to do with Him, not their own wickedness and life-style. The evil that is spoken about the disciples needs to be “false” in the sense that it is not reflective of their own sins, but of simply that they belong to the Lord.

“Rejoice, and be glad...” – this directive means that true joy - the experience of knowing that they have obeyed God - in this endurance of persecution and false accusation makes clear the privilege of obedience to God in this life. The gladness that arises in knowing that we have obeyed, is a matter of joy. This is the present experience of the disciples in this life – the wonder of having an awareness within themselves of the joy of having brought pleasure to God; a joy which is made sure in the face of and by the presence of the persecution and false insults of the world.

## nt 50 – Matthew 5.13-16

### Salt for the earth and Light to the world

*Read carefully Luke 17.22-37;.*

*50-1 Salt and light: a matter of being and so doing.*

*50-2 The salt of the “earth”*

*50-3 The light of the “world”*

*50-4 Good works bring glory to your Father in heaven*

*50-5 A global work is on show here, not a limited Jewish one.*

## 50-1 Salt and light: a matter of being and so doing.

Both of these metaphors, “salt” and “light” have to do with the “being” of the new covenant people. It is, in the words of Jesus, something the people of the new covenant “are”. It is because of who they are given to “be”, in relation to the earth and the world, that they can “act” in such a way as they will be able to perform for the earth and the world what they have been set to do in relation to both. It is a case of their “being” and their “action” arising from whom God has caused them to be; and that, in turn, is derived from who they are because of their relation to Himself.

Both “salt” and “light” are seen here to have a direct connection with what they are as being the foundation for what they do. Salt is considered for one matter only – its taste. And light also for one matter – it cannot be hidden, it must shine. Through the image of the salt we see that if it is not what it is - has become tasteless - then it cannot be restored and it cannot perform its function for the earth.

In this way, both metaphors are making the simple transition from who they are to what they do. The being of the covenant people finds its expression in what they do; but they cannot do what they do, unless they are who they are. That is the order of it; first the being and then the doing.

The answer to this is found in who they are; it has to do with their being in relation to the world. As the new covenant people they mean something, not just in Israel, but actually for the whole world. The target of the old covenant was that through Abraham, God would make him the father of many nations [Genesis 15]. This fulfillment is found in Paul’s writings, particularly in Galatians 3.18 and in Romans 8.

## 50-2 The salt of the “earth”

The idea of rejoicing in the face of the world’s persecution leads naturally on to the meaning of the disciples of Jesus for the world itself. If they are enduring persecution “on account of” Jesus, do they have a positive role in regards to this world that gives them such a hard time?

The people of the new covenant have a role in regard to the earth and also to the world. They are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Some have taken the metaphor of salt, particularly with the added reference to its taste, to mean that the people of the new covenant are the seasoning of the earth; in the sense of a little among the whole makes for the deliciousness of the meal generally. But that takes the metaphor into the culinary area of food, whereas the metaphor is applied to the earth itself. And we need to think of the

earth itself as a whole, for the other parallel, light, is applied to the world.

If that is the case then, the metaphor as being applied to the earth, then the use of salt in the ancient world as a preservative might suggest a more appropriate connection. Used in that way it strikes a relationship between the presence of the disciples of Jesus and the preservation of the earth [*nt*172-7]. This really has behind it Jesus understanding of the final arrival of the “day” of the Son of Man. It is a day which is preceded by the “days” of the Son of Man where there is still time to know and receive the grace of God as it has come in Jesus Christ.

All this is laid out in Jesus’ teaching in Luke 17.22-37, the departure of the people of the new covenant from off the earth, to be gathered to Jesus on the “day” of the Son of Man, a day which also marks the immanent judgment and destruction of the earth.

Notice here that this is not something which the disciples achieve by an act of will or their resolute intention, but by simply ‘being there’ – they are the salt of the earth until they are called away to the Lord on that “day”. It is their function as He decides it, for as long a time as He sets.

### 50-3 The light of the “world”

The “world” here, in this context, must mean the people of the world who can see good works that can be done “before men”. If the disciples are the salty preservers of the earth as long as they are on it, then they are called to be the light of the world while they are amongst its people.

This statement of Jesus is not so much a call to action; it does not state a mission so much as it describes a state the people of the new covenant find themselves in relation to the people of the world. For, the two examples Jesus uses, the city set on a hill and a lamp lighted to illuminate the house, both of these examples speak of the inevitability of them being obvious. They simply cannot be hidden; in the case of the city because you cannot hide it, and in the case of the lamp lit because it would be contrary to the intention of lighting it in the first place. By its very nature light will be seen and also illuminate – that is consistent with its very being. So much for the nature of the people of the new covenant in relationship to the world.

### 50-4 Good works bring glory to your Father in heaven

Yet there is more here. For Jesus went on and said that the “light” that the world can see are the “good works” of the new, covenant people. That is, what is visible to them is the outworking of the life of God resident within the disciples. For “good” works are actions that originate in the life of God; a life

that his covenant people share.

Yet, insofar that the world can see the works the world can go on to draw a conclusion, the world can glorify God that such works are done. That is, what is drawn from the world is an acknowledgement that the works, having been observed, are good, and that this is something that brings glory to God.

Further, in acknowledging that these works glorify God, the world might also begin to think that such works arise from the shared life that children have with their Father. So it exposes the relationship – and this is what it means for the new covenant people to be the light of the world.

As it was for Jesus, who is the light of the world, He demonstrated a life that glorified His Father. He did it in such a way that drew people to acknowledge Him as Son of God.

## 50-5 A global work is on show here, not a limited Jewish one.

Jesus first instructed his disciples that they are blessed to be partakers of the present kingdom and are heirs to that kingdom's future promises. But then he went on to say something about them in relationship to the *earth* and the *world* implies the wide, cosmic reach of His own coming and work.

It also implies that he wanted them to know that his coming was not simply a Jewish affair. While salvation is, strictly speaking, *from the Jews*, it nevertheless is *to the world*. The teaching of Jesus asks his disciples, even at this early stage in their thinking to not just live before their brother Jews; but to understand that they are related to the purposes of God for the whole world.

This theme is struck by Jesus in other teaching he brought, and particularly that which reaches us in the Gospel of John. There we see him reminding the Pharisees, in their blindness concerning him [John 9.41] that he was the true shepherd of the sheep, known by his own sheep [John 10.1-6], the door every day for the sheep leading to provision and deep safety by night [John 10.7-10] and whose ownership of the sheep is demonstrated by the fact that he lays down his life for them in accordance with the express wish of his Father [John 10.11-15].

Jesus also reminded the Pharisees of the international ramifications from the very first first choice of Israel as a covenant people. In Genesis 12, the call of Abram, is positioned straight after the record of the creation and fall, the judgment of the flood and the tower of Babel. It is clear that Abram's call to be the covenant person, and so to receive the promises and commission of God for his people, has implications for the reversal of Adam's rebellion and he restoration of the whole world. That is certainly the way Paul moves in his understanding in Romans 5.12-end!

Israel had forgotten this, being more intent with their special relationship with God in contrast to the Gentiles, rather than seeing their call for the benefit of the Gentiles. Jesus re-dressed this willful laying aside of their global task. We see Jesus reminding the Pharisee's of this when he said,

“ And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear my voice: and they shall be one flock with one shepherd.” [John 10.16 NASV].

## nt 51 – Matthew 5.17-20

### Jesus and the Torah [the Law of Moses]

*51-1 The law and the prophets*

*51-2 not to “abolish” but to “fulfil”*

*51-3 The law and the prophets shall not pass away until all is accomplished*

*51-4 A righteousness that “exceeded” that of the scribes and Pharisees*

#### 51-1 The law and the prophets

Whenever someone arises in history with a radical message people always assess this person in the light of what has gone before. And this is as it must be; for people who have attended to the historical matters before their own time usually live in the light of them. So if the new arrival must find a place in his time he cannot avoid being compared and contrasted with that which has gone before.

In Israel, as the ancient covenant people of God this was a particularly acute matter. For, all that had been said before, had the force of God's utterance; none of it was to be ignored or somehow dropped out. Whatever God had said, about how to live to please Him, or about his plans for the world and his people in that world was, in some part, already known and lived upon.

The covenant with Abram pre-dates the coming of the law through Moses. When the Law was given through Moses it built on the basis of the covenant with Abraham. As Israel lived out their life before the Lord in covenant with Him, they found that the Law [Torah], by its exactitude made them aware that

they were constantly breaking the covenant.

The Lord graciously renewed the covenant with Israel. He assured them that they were His people, and He would not desert them; He would uphold His side of the covenant relationship. As we have seen in the prophet Isaiah [nt48pt3-2], it is the righteousness of God – His constancy within the covenant – that would be the instrument of saving Israel, both repeatedly in their history and finally in their Messiah.

The Torah [Genesis to Deuteronomy] came to be viewed by Israel as the standing law of God; it recounts the Exodus from Egypt as the foundational salvation act of God for Israel, rescuing them out of slavery and taking them into a wilderness where the relationship between Him and them became focused as they lived with Him alongside them. The time of the Exodus from Egypt became foundational to Israel's annual feasts and civil life. There was to be a solemn reminder of the Exodus at the feast of Passover, all the way through Israel's subsequent history.

The prophets are the dynamic word of God. They are men and women of the immediate moment, raised up throughout Israel's history to correct and draw the people back to God when they go astray; the prophets also to them with the assurances of God's faithfulness to them even as He was often disciplining them. They brought hope of future promises in dark and hopeless times.

## 51-2 not to “abolish” but to “fulfil”

In the way that Jesus taught His disciples, he was aware that he could be misconstrued. When he used such introductory statements as “you have heard it said of old times...but I say to you...” he was certainly contrasting the ancient teaching with his own. But he doesn't speak as one who is supplanting the old teaching, so as to invalidate it, he contrasts it with his own because in him the kingdom of God has drawn near. God is doing a work through Jesus which brings with it the renovation of the people of the new covenant. The saving righteousness of God to Israel is culminating in the person of the Messiah. Israel, the whole people, was described by Isaiah as the suffering servant [Isaiah 40-55]; this servant has now been focussed down into one person of the Messiah [Isaiah 52-53]. Through this “one” man the righteousness of God is saving the “many” and bringing about the renovation promised through Ezekiel 36 [nt48pt1-3] and Jeremiah 31 [nt48pt2-6].

So, when Jesus taught his disciples to hear his exposition of the way of living - the way that resulted from a renovated heart and with a new spirit - he is not abolishing the law and the prophets, but rather, as the prophet of God's own,

final time he is teaching a way of life that, being based on the grace of the gift of God which came through the Messiah, is now an appropriate way to live.

Further, this new, appropriate way can only be stated as a *contrast* to the old. Not by way of abolishment of the old, but by way of the fulfillment of the old to where God always intended it should go. To see the progressive unveiling of God's purposes requires that there is a former place of reference and a latter place of reference. The latter place can only be seen for what it is in the light of the former. This was what Jesus was doing when he taught his disciples.

### 51-3 The law and the prophets shall not pass away until all is accomplished

The necessity of the progressive movement gives value to the contrast. So it is true that the full plan of God for his ancient people Israel and through them, for the world is now revealed but still at work – bringing all the people in to the kingdom. While that situation still prevails, of a salvation accomplished and yet still being appropriated, then the law and the prophets are maintained. They are maintained for right discernment of the gospel of Jesus as coming from the Jews. And so the early promises of God can be discerned so that the later fulfillment may be recognized.

While this state of mixture is still at large, the law and the prophets also maintain the order of the world, holding back the lawlessness of the wicked. They shall not pass away as they still have this restraining function.

Also, the presence of the “renovated” people of the new covenant – both Jew and Gentile – can only be recognized against the background of the law and the prophets. If the new life is to be seen as a matter of the heart, then the “doing of the law” from an attitude that shows forth the freedom of “sons” of God, requires that testimony to be visible to the world through its measurement against the standard of the law and the prophets.

The Lord warned against anti-nomism – the abandonment of the law - by those who are “in the kingdom”. For them, with a new heart and spirit, to think that, or to teach others that, they could abandon the law would render them “least” in the kingdom of heaven.

### 51-4 A righteousness that “exceeded” that of the scribes and Pharisees

As we have seen before [*nt48pt3-4*] there is to be a practical expression of righteousness among the men and women of the kingdom of heaven. It is a response to the righteousness of God that saves them, and it is primarily a matter

of their trusting in that promised, saving righteousness of God [*nt48pt3-2*]. Faith, we saw, was the primary movement of response engendered by the announcement of the gospel [*nt48pt3-3*].

Unless the practice of the disciples exceeds the scribes and the Pharisees it may be said of them that they have not entered the kingdom of heaven. The new life is not theirs. What Jesus means is expressed as the demonstration of the way the scribes and the Pharisees is now contrasted with the way of the new life in what follows.

## nt 52 – Matthew 5.21-26

### Living from the new heart: Anger and murder

*Read carefully 1 Corinthians 6.1-8*

*52-1 What were the ancients told? [verse 21]*

*52-2 "But I say to you..." [verses 22-3]*

*52-3 The brother and the Lord; not disconnected.*

*52-4 Peace lovers can have a radical approach to the civil law [verses 25-26]*

#### 52-1 What were the ancients told? [verse 21]

We have said in *nt51-4* that the demonstration of how the new life in Christ exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees will be stated.

We begin with the contrast of the old and new. Jesus began with looking at the ancients - the older ones of the past - and he asked, "what was said to them?" In answering his own question he reminded his audience of two statements: they were told that they shall not murder [Exodus 20.13; Deuteronomy 5.17] and that if they did commit murder they would be liable to "the court" [Deuteronomy 16.18; 2 Chronicles 19.5ff both texts indicate that judges were appointed in every town].

The first of these statements reminds them of the prohibition, as the covenant people of God, that in their communal life they were not to take the life of another person. But the second part is where Jesus placed the emphasis; the

idea of being liable to the court. That is, if the ancients lived under the sanction of the judgment of the court when they did wrong they would understand that it was a matter of a “deed done” that would bring them before the court. This deed would require to be proven; the trial of such a matter turned on the performance of the external deed – was it done or not?

## 52-2 “But I say to you... ” [verses 22-3]

Jesus shifted the issue of liability from the doing of the external deed - in this case the taking of a life - to what was going on in the heart, the seat and origin of the anger. And to call your brother “Raca” – an Aramaic word meaning ‘empty headed’ or ‘good for nothing’, would take the matter to the supreme court; and to call him “you fool” leads to hell itself. We have moved from the court, to the supreme court, to hell itself; the last being the judgment of God, not just of the neighbours about a deed.

In this pattern of ascending courts of accountability Jesus opened up a disturbing issue. It is that the registration of sin as having been done has now moved to the internal issues of the heart. The accountability is no longer a matter of external deed but of resident internal anger and the judging of your brother out of your own view of him.

Further, to take or not take a life is an externally, communally tested thing; but to rubbish your brother, and to make a judgment on him as a fool, speaks of a way of relating that is much more finely attuned, working with a much more exacting standard. It indicates the presence of God as known directly to the person.

Just as the sense of what God requires by external law was accounted as to deeds done; so now, in the kingdom practice of righteousness, there is a personal – because internal – sense of accountability. This indicates that the community is both the Lord himself as well as the brothers and sisters.

If we live before the Lord, as resident within us, then the registration of misdemeanour is now a matter for the individual and the Spirit of God. Immediate conviction of sin is internally registered. This practice of righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees because it is a matter, as Jeremiah foretold, of everyone knowing the Lord for himself; and having no need for anyone to teach him, whether it be through the threat of external case-law, or the priests and officials of God’s people. Yet, this does not mean that the liability has decreased; it has actually increased, because the definition of sin is not deed only but concerns the heart, thoughts and speech which expresses a judgment of a brother from one’s own self as a judge. This latter idea will turn up again [*nt61*].

### 52-3 The brother and the Lord; not disconnected.

The community of life that Jesus saw operating was one of the interconnected Lord and the community, the brethren. Just as it was in the Law of Moses, there was the first tablet of the commandments having to do with God and the second tablet of the law with one's neighbour. There was to be no disconnect between the two by virtue of the covenant. So there was now a clear maintenance of the unity between the shared life of God and the sharers in the Life - they were one covenant community.

And this implied that there could not be a disconnection between God and one's brother. Jesus made clear that worship to God could only be offered if one was at peace with one's brother. And it was right to clear up any disturbance with the brother before you offered worship to the Lord.

For the people of the new covenant, it was vital to see themselves in relation to one another as sons of the same Father [6.45]; theirs was a shared life together; the relation to God was not to be split from the relation to the brethren. Our relation to God was dependent upon our maintained reconciliation with our brother; no peace there, no access to God in practice.

### 52-4 Peace lovers can have a radical approach to the civil law [verses 25-26]

It is the case then the people of the new covenant are living internally before God's bar all the time, and are responding to the shared life of the brothers and God. Since they are not taken out of the world Jesus drew out the implications for the way that we shall deal with the fact that the Law will not be departing until all things are accomplished.

He recognized that new covenant people may have opponents at law. What this describes is not a criminal case, as was the case of murder above, but a civil case between two disputing parties. Jesus wanted his disciples to understand that they have a changed life; and he encouraged them to make friends with their opponent while on the way to the courts. That is, there is much they can do in reconciling with their opponent *before* they come to the court of the day. He taught that they should live out of their desire to live at peace with all men and come to a settlement of such matters between themselves. This was a matter of wisdom.

For, if their opponent delivered them to the court, then they come under the judge whose judgment will stand and whose penalty will need to be fully paid. Jesus recognized that the law must be complied with once it had delivered

a judgment. So He was asking his disciples to recognize that and not diminish its reality. Yet they could act before they got to court.

But new possibilities are opened to new covenant people, they can settle with their opponent; they may even be prepared to be defrauded [1 Corinthians 6.1-8].

## nt 53 – Matthew 5.27-32

### Living from the new heart: Lust and the heart Adultery & Divorce

*Read carefully Exodus 20.14; Deuteronomy 5.18; 24.1-3;  
Jeremiah 3.; Matthew 19.3-12; Mark 10.4; Romans 7.20,24; 8.23; Galatians 5.16-  
24*

*53-1 What were the ancients told? [verse 27]*

*53-2 "But I say to you... " [verses 28]*

*52-3 Living in a compromised body with a new heart*

*53-4 Divorce and adultery [verses 31-32]*

*53-5 Law as a remedy for sin already committed*

*53-6 The new-covenant understanding of case-law.*

#### 53-1 What were the ancients told? [verse 27]

Jesus recalled for his listeners what the ancients were told about the prohibition to commit adultery and the provisions for divorce of the Mosaic Law. He took the issue of adultery first and spoke to that in a way similar to the approach he gave to murder. As he spoke of the anger in the heart that is the origin of murder so he spoke here of the action and the heart but with a difference.

#### 53-2 "But I say to you... " [verses 28]

With the murder act he traces that to an origin in the heart. The difference with the adultery issue is that He made clear that the "looking to lust for her" is a committing of adultery in the heart. That is the act of looking indicates an adulterous compromise that is already in the heart. Once again, the final deed of actual adultery, which becomes the externally obvious matter of the law's jurisdiction is radicalized back to the 'looking so as to [with the intention

of] lust' as being an evidence of the adultery within the heart.

Jesus drove for a radical matter here; it is that the looking eye and the right hand can cause "you" to stumble and he suggests their removal, as a part of the body. It is better to be maimed in this way than for your person to be drawn into hell.

### 52-3 Living in a compromised body with a new heart

Jesus was making clear that there is in the bodies of people of the new covenant, a powerful drive that can have an effect on the inner being – the heart. If the discussion of murder showed that the heart was the seat, or origin, of the actions of the body then the discussion of adultery also indicates that the body's desires and members can have an effect on the inner heart of a person. Jesus' remedy for this is one of absolute warring against the body. His examples are extreme; but they serve to make a crucial distinction. It is the distinction between "I" and "my body"; a matter which needs to be taken into account under the new covenant.

Jesus was showing that even if there was a new heart and a new spirit put into his new covenant people, they still lived in a body that was not yet redeemed – to use the Pauline language of Romans 7.20,24; 8.23.

His teaching here, by making a sharp distinction between "you" and your "members" of your body directed his listeners to have a clear understanding of the *body* with its natural desires of the flesh – again to borrow from Paul – and of the *person* who is participating in the new life. The flesh will lust against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh [Galatians 5.16-24].

### 53-4 Divorce and adultery [verses 31-32]

When the ancients had been addressed by Moses, he had brought before them two kinds of law. There were the matters that God had directly communicated to them through Moses; such matters as the Ten Commandments and the cultic ritual law. These took the form "you shall...you shall not..." They are law which expresses God's primary mind, where He has taken an initiative to reveal his requirements for his people.

There were also laws that provided for special cases and responded to the breakdown of the societal matters; these took the form "if... then...". The divorce law was of this second sort, it dealt with a set of affairs such that if they happened then there was a way to maintain the order of the society. These were not an initiative of God so much as His response to Israel's wicked response.

“1 When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house,

2 and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man’s wife,

3 and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or of the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife,

4 then the former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God gives you as in inheritance.”

Deuteronomy 24.1-4 NASV 1960

## 53-5 Law as a remedy for sin already committed

In another place [*nt189*], when Jesus was asked a direct question upon this matter of divorce he had made it clear that the reason why Moses permitted this divorce law was because of the people’s “hardness of heart”. That is, as we have noted above, the divorce law is of the “if...and if...then...” sort of situation. It seeks to order the disorder that has come about through sin already committed; the husband “has found some indecency in her”. That is why he writes her a certificate of divorce.

Jesus taught here, in this section, that the only reason for writing a certificate was that because there was unchastity [adultery] in the relationship. Unchastity which, of course, meant that the marriage covenant had already been broken. He makes that the only ground for divorce at all. That is the point of his “except for the cause of unchastity”. The certificate of divorce, which is a written document, does not break the marriage; it is only issued as a recognition that the covenant was already broken. And this is the meaning of the Deuteronomy quotation above, the woman of the second husband cannot return to the first, because, from his perspective, she is defiled.

## 53-6 The new-covenant understanding of case-law.

What Jesus made clear for the disciples was that, since they are living in a body which has desires that, if unchecked or resisted, can engender adultery in the heart, then it was vital for his disciples to know that the possibility of such lust being accommodated by the law, via a certificate of divorce, was not available.

He needed to close off that possibility to his disciples lest they took the law, which had been designed as an emergency order for the broken marriage through unchastity, as being taken to mean that divorce was something permitted by God, instead of a law which He set in motion to manage disorder in marriage when it arose from their hardness of heart.

New covenant folks are not looking for what the law might allow, or cater for, in a fallen world. They are living out of their inner heart and want to preserve that heart and guard it from their own bodily lusts, lusts that might be rationalized as having possibilities in a mistakenly understood "permitted" law.

## nt 54 – Matthew 5.33-37

### Words of integrity: no disconnection between what is meant, said and done.

*Read carefully Leviticus 19.12; Deuteronomy 23.21-23; Numbers 30.2;*

*54-1 The untrustworthiness of the word of man when spoken to one another*

*54-2 What were the ancients told? [verse 33]*

*54-3 "But I say to you..." [verses 34-6]*

*54-4 Knowing the Lord one-on-one.*

#### 54-1 The untrustworthiness of the word of man when spoken to one another

Behind the use of vows and oaths presupposed that the word of a man was a compromised thing; what he said with his mouth might be delivered in deed or it may not. Men knew that this disconnection was true of all men; so that, under the pressure of a moment when they desperately required their word to be believed, they made their words seem greater, or of more import, or more trustworthy, by vowing to the Lord or by taking an oath on something or Someone rightly revered by all. Oaths and vows are really a remedy in the moment for the fact that the word of man has become unbelievable.

## 54-2 What were the ancients told? [verse 33]

Jesus recalled for his listeners, using a summary of Leviticus 19.12, Numbers 30.2 and Deuteronomy 23.21, what the ancients were told about vows; they should not promise or vow falsely and when they vowed to the Lord they should fulfill them. They should keep their word.

“21 When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the Lord your God will surely require it of you.

22 However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you.

23 You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised.”

Deuteronomy 23.21-23 NASV 1960

What this ancient text meant that when you spoke to the Lord then it was vital to understand that He dealt in matters truly; things were either true or false. In matters of speech, such as His own utterances, there would be no discrepancy in what was said and what was done. And He required that, in exchanges with Him in conversation, that what we say is what we do. That is to rightly deal with Him as He truly is. That is the point of the expression “You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips”.

## 54-3 “But I say to you... “ [verses 34-6]

Jesus’ teaching was that men and women of the kingdom, when dealing with God directly in exchange, should not make oaths at all.

[1]The first reason was simple. There was nothing by which a person could swear to God that was greater than God Himself. He was beyond being impressed by things, which it turned out, were lesser than Himself.

If they chose to swear by heaven, that was God’s throne and so was not greater than He; if by the earth, that was his footstool and so not greater than He, and if by Jerusalem, then that was his city and was a great city because his Name dwelt there.

They were not dealing with a man, but God Himself; no comparisons of greatness [such as we saw was the basis of oaths in 54-1 above] can be found.

[2] Further, the oath added nothing in reality to the power to enforce what was said. Simply by making a statement and then calling some greater thing to swear by so as to *add weight* to the word spoken, did not of course change *the personal power* of the word spoken. To swear by your own head,

when it was not in your power to make any hair white or black, meant that, as a thing to swear by, your head was an example of your impotence, your inability to alter things.

[To think of a parallel in our own time; there is no “positive confession” which can, be the speaking of something out into the universe or to/before others, that can bring a change to things as they are. The power of the word of man has to do with it being in line with the objective truth of things as God has arranged them, not to some belief about words.] See later the speaking of Jesus to the disciples about the fig tree he cursed [*nt210,213*].

So this linking of your word to some other thing, so as to give it weight, simply muddied the waters and was willfully confusing to others.

The matter of giving your word about a matter, anything beyond a simple “Yes” [I will] and “No”[I will not] was, in the Lord’s teaching, evil.

## 54-4 Knowing the Lord one-on-one.

For the ancients, when they spoke to God, He had allowed such oath-laced speech to be used when they addressed Him. If they had to make an oath to impress one another with the importance of their speech then they could transpose that to their exchanges with Him and, with the warnings of the need to pay their vows – to deliver on what they had said, this was a possible manner of speech before Him.

But for the people of the new covenant, as a people with their heart renovated and their spirit new, with an intimate, internal knowledge of the Lord, there arrives, not all at once, but gradually, a new firmness of who they are, a deep sense of increasing wholeness about being truly human – an inner integrity.

In dealing with the Lord direct, and having His constant witness, by His Spirit with their spirit as to them being the sons of God [Romans 8.12-16], being led by His Spirit, then there is a straightness of dealing with God that is of the same base as our inner awareness of ourselves. Such a life-style engenders integrity with others. In this way the word spoken does not need to be boosted – which is paramount to an admission that it is, of itself, unreliable – it simply needs to be said as something with integrity.

Jesus’ rejection of oaths was an affirmation that true integrity and true speech had arrived in the coming of the new covenant that he would establish for us in his own blood [*nt247*].

# nt 55 – Matthew 5.38-42

## Personal non-retaliation: overcoming evil with good.

*Read carefully Leviticus 24.20; Deuteronomy 19.21;  
Exodus 22.24;*

*55-1 What were the ancients told? "An eye for an eye..."[verse 38]*

*55-2 Do not resist him who is evil...*

*55-3 "If anyone wants to sue you...force you...ask of you..." [verses 40-42]*

### 55-1 What were the ancients told? "An eye for an eye..." "[verse 38]

In his teaching, Jesus was referring to a section of the Torah which dealt with personal injuries as they happen in the normal everyday life of a community. And as we saw above, it is the area of case-law – taking the form of "if... then...".

"22 And if men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she has a miscarriage, yet there is no further injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him; and he shall pay as he judges decide.

23 But of there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life,

24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise." Exodus 21.22-24 NASV 1960

Here, in Exodus, the setting is the miscarriage from a fight and the reparation that the husband seeks before the judges. He sets a fine that he seeks, but it is the judges who decide what the defendant shall pay. That is the context; it is one of personal reparation.

Following that, there is a provision concerning "any further injury". On that score the judges have a mandatory sentence laid down beyond which they cannot go: it is that of an equivalent, eye for eye...etc. That is, at civil law, it is

not possible to sentence your opponent's body to a corporally applied penalty that exceeds the damage that was done to your own body or someone of your family.

In this case the "eye for eye..." provision is a limitation; it prevents the use of the law as a means to bring excessive vengeance and so be used for personal wickedness. Leviticus 24.17-20 records the same context and the same provision.

“ 15 A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed: on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.

16 If a malicious witness arises rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing...

18 ... and the judges shall investigate thoroughly; and of the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely,

19 then you shall do unto him as he intended to do to his brother. Thus you will purge the evil from among you.

20 And the rest will hear and be afraid, and you will never again do such an evil thing among you.

21 Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.” Deuteronomy 19.15-21 NASV 1960

Here, in Deuteronomy, the setting is that of the false witness who is seeking to inflict pain on his own personal enemy and using the law to do it. This means that he is taking the Law of God to use it for his own personal ends.

In the first, and most important, place this is an appropriation of God's word, as stated in law, so as to usurp God's purposes of maintaining good civil order among His people. Attempting to overthrow God's word for personal purposes, it is a personal rebellion against Him; hence the strong encouragement to the judges to show no pity, but to steel themselves to carry out the appropriate retaliatory penalties of Deuteronomy 19.21.

In the second place, it threatens to destroy the basis of ascertaining truth in legal matters where there is a dispute of neighbours brought before the judges of the day.

In this case the "eye for eye" provision also speaks of a limitation; the judges will inflict a bodily penalty commensurate with that which the false witness sought from his neighbour.

## 55-2 “Do not resist him who is evil...”

In this sermon on the mount, Jesus takes the civil order of the people of God, as it was dependent on God’s law, for granted; and he makes no comment on the broad provision of the law in its social setting. So the setting in Deuteronomy, which we have looked at above, with its instruction to the judges to uphold good order in the face of the false witness is not in view here.

And, while the context of the Exodus and Leviticus readings, mentioned above, are also the laying down of the jurisprudence for such civil cases, the setting of personal redress is uppermost in the mind of the reader.

Jesus’ taught his disciples to look at the principle of personal redress. Whereas formerly the ancients had recall to civil law Jesus encourages them to not resist the evil person. And he provides a strong contrast to the ancient civil law; instead of seeking redress for a slap on the left cheek, the recipient of evil goes on to offer the right cheek. There is not so much an encouragement of evil to go further, but, there is encouragement for the recipient of the evil to accept that their person is available, and in some way, open to such behaviour. How does this teaching of Jesus constitute not an abolishment of the law but its fulfillment?

To grapple with this requires us to recognize that, in the presentation of the Gospels we are reading, that there is a pattern in the life of Jesus that first stresses his active ministry and then presents for us his passive ministry.

His active ministry is seen in the outgoing of his own power towards others in deliverance, in question and answer, in healing, in rebuke of his opponents, in the correction and teaching of his disciples. He is very much in control, making an impact in the lives of others.

His passive ministry begins as he sets his face towards Jerusalem, prophesying his rejection at the hands of the current leaders in Israel, his mocking his judicial killing and his resurrection. It is a time of his “passion” – a time of suffering at the hands of others. It is pre-eminently a handing over of himself to the wickedness of men and women and also to the angelic powers of evil behind them. It is, of course, at the same time, a trusting in God, a relying on His word, to deliver him. It is the ‘righteousness’ of the man of God who is prepared to ‘throw his life away’ – to offer his life and body to evil perpetrators to accomplish the revelation of the righteousness of God as He works salvation through his only Son.

It is the mark of Jesus’ disciples that they are people who have seen this revelation of the righteousness of God. According to Paul, that is the central revelation in the gospel message [Romans 1.16-17]. This is what our Gospel writers know.

The fulfillment of the law is that such disciples of Jesus can be called to 'throw their life away' and take up the example of Jesus, knowing that, whatever the evil man will throw against them is to be born in the knowledge that vengeance is not theirs to take.

“17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.

18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay', [*Deut 32.35*] says the Lord.

20 'But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head' [*2Kings 6.22 Prov 25.21*].

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Romans 12.17-21 NASV 1960

Further, as we see Paul's perspective in Romans 12, a chapter that mirrors the sermon on the mount, we understand that there is an overcoming principle here; evil is overcome in the time in which we live – between the first and second coming of the Lord – by not attempting an immediate re-dress, as the civil law allowed. Rather, as changed people, knowing the example and life of the Lord, we shall yield to evil at the moment, knowing that there is a time coming when all things shall be set to right. This is to overcome evil with good. It signifies a freedom from personal pre-occupation arising from an immersion in the things of the kingdom of God.

So, at the heart of Jesus' fulfillment of the law here is the change to individuals to have the freedom to not stand for themselves, but to know that the victory over evil comes by the hand of God through a suffering Messiah. The power of that victory finds its practical expression in a righteousness that is free to suffer, even at the hands of evil men and women, because the power to throw one's life away for the kingdom's sake is a freedom no law can bring.

This is to not live under law but under grace. While it does not ask us to think of the law as being abolished, it is certainly fulfilled in that a deep peaceful living arises from such an attitude of life towards one's fellows.

55-3 “If anyone wants to sue you...force you...ask of you... ” [verses 40-42]

The same principle that allows the people of the new covenant to suffer meaningfully and victoriously also sets them free to, if sued at law, to go beyond the set fine that the judges approve to letting their opponent have more than the law can give him. This means that the law does not have the last say in the civil exchange but the freedom of the individual does; it the expression of his desire to live at peace with all men insofar that it depends on him.

To the chagrin of the local Jews in their homeland, the average Roman soldier had the right to compel a local individual of any occupied country to carry his pack for one mile: Jesus call is to go for two miles. In other words, the compulsion is not a matter to be feared or seen as onerous in the light of the freedom to give to one’s neighbour when called upon; whether that is by compulsion through law, or by asking if he may borrow. The amazing freedom to throw their life away in service of their neighbour was even available for their evil neighbour.

The fear of the constant borrower of your goods used to be that one could be “used up” by a neighbour. The same attitude Jesus is assuming in his people is that which sets a person free to not turn away from the borrower, but to happily lend.

## nt 56 – Matthew 5.43-48

### Love for enemies.

*Read carefully Leviticus 19.18; Deuteronomy 23.3-6; Luke 6.27-28, 32-36*

56-1 *What were the ancients told? “Love your neighbour...hate your enemy”[verse 43]*

56-2 *“But I say unto you...”[verse 44]*

56-3 *Sons who are like their Father in heaven*

56-4 *You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

56-5 *Not abolition, but fulfillment of Law apart from the Law; through “sons”.*

56-6 *“except your righteousness exceed that of ....”*

## 56-1 What were the ancients told? “Love your neighbour...hate your enemy” [verse 43]

“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself; I am the Lord.”

Leviticus 19.18

“3 No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord;...  
4 because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt...

6 You shall never seek their peace or their prosperity all your days”  
Deuteronomy 23.3-6

In the case of these statements from the Old Testament, we see that the “you” is plural. These matters concern the community and its corporate enemies and neighbours. So the “you” who are addressed in these matters and attitudes were “you all”. This is vital for we are not dealing here, as we were in the case of non-retaliation with the individual, but with the people of the covenant.

## 56-2 “But I say unto you...” [verse 44]

In the case of Jesus’ statements in verse 44 the context is, as it was above, in the plural. It is about the new covenant people of the kingdom; what attitude shall they take in the blessed case [nt49-9] of finding that they have persecutors?

They are to pray for them who persecute them. Jesus did not teach what it was that they were to pray, but his implication is that they would seek the good for their persecutors.

## 56-3 Sons who are like their Father in heaven

The reason for this way of living is found in the relationship between God and his people; they are sons of their Father. In knowing God as their Father the community share His life and so have the capacity to be like Him.

This consistent theme of being sons of God [5.9] and being sons of “their Father” [5.16, 45; 6.1,4,6,9,14,18,26,32; 7.11] implies that as sons they will show that they are sons by behaving according to the character of their father. His character is such that He regards men and women of the earth as

recipients of his sunshine and rain, no matter whether they are good or evil, righteous or unrighteous. That is, regardless of their attitude to Him, He still acts for their benefit because the kindness and goodness of His own character finds expression in what He does. He could not deny Himself. He is good in himself; and so acts that way out of his own self-consistency.

His “sons” likewise are not to love only those who are kind to them. That has no reward with God – by which Jesus means that this is not an action that God would regard as good; being in some way like His own. [See the similar idea of ‘reward’ in 6.1]. To simply ‘love’ your own people and ‘greet’ those who in your own set is something that even Gentiles and tax-gatherers know.

## 56-4 You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

In the context in which Jesus was speaking, the discussion turns on the truth that the sons of the father are to become like him. Sonship finds its expression through obedience, and that is conformity to the will of the father. But through enacting the will of the father we are finding ourselves trained to end up like him.

So to be ‘perfect’ is to arrive at the likeness of Father. And this is what the Greek text means when the sons are to become τέλειοι [the mature ones, the finished ones, grown up] as their Father is τέλειος [a mature, full person].

The goal of the new covenant community is to be like their God whom they know intimately, as Father. As readers we shall notice that the rest of this sermon on the mount will develop that theme. Such a way of life means the fulfillment of the Law.

## 56-5 Not abolition, but fulfillment of Law apart from the Law; through “sons”.

People who focus on the law are often found to be treating the laws of God as somehow separate from his Person. This is common with laws and rules that a person has laid down. In practice, people focus on the rules and forget the person whose will lies behind them.

It is now time to look back on this opening series of statements that Jesus has made with the introduction “you have heard that it was said of old...but I say unto you...”. They are a commentary, or an exposition of Matthew 5.17-19 insofar that each example from the Old Testament illustrates how Jesus has not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it.

Yet, what is remarkable is that He has not shown that the law is ful-

filled by somehow showing another application of law, or even that it has been achieved in a some new, remarkable way. In fact the fulfillment of the law is seen in a way that is *apart from the law itself*. It is that factor that led many of his opponents to think that he was just brushing the law aside.

Through Jesus' radical life, death and resurrection for us and in our place, the law has come to be fulfilled through *the making of new persons* to fulfill it. The renovation that takes place in the persons of the new covenant people means that they fulfill the law while not living under law but under grace. They are not paying attention to God as a Lawgiver, with penalties and threats behind Him, although such things are true and are learned through Law. They have been drawn, through Jesus, to focus their eyes on God as a heavenly Father who has as His ultimate goal for them, not that they should keep rules under threat, but to become like Him, freely, as only sons can become. This is what Paul calls the "liberty of the sons of God" [Romans 8; Galatians 4].

### 56-5 "except your righteousness exceed that of ...."

This series of statements from Matthew 5.17-48 also marks the beginning of how Jesus understood that the righteousness of the disciples would come to exceed and surpass the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. For as long as righteousness is seen as a personal effort of sinners to comply with the law of Moses under their own steam and fired by their own zeal, then all the Law can bring them is condemnation and a deep sense of failure. Both within themselves and especially towards God.

And unfortunately, since this brings them no comfort, there is a way to have some comfort in the eyes of their fellow men. And this is what constitutes the "leaven" of the Pharisees – the defiling yeast in the Passover loaf of Israel. It was that they turned, and taught others to turn, their eyes from the Lord to the reward of appearing religious before men and women. It is about this matter that Jesus now warns his disciples, recorded for us in Matthew 6.

## nt 57 – Matthew 6.1-4

Intimate and holy relations: Father sees the heart

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*Read carefully Matthew 16.6,11; Mark 8.15; Luke 12.1;1 Corin-*

*thians 5.6*

*57-1 The practice of righteousness*

*56-2 Beware!*

*57-3 Who do you want to notice?*

*57-4 Secret matter of almsgiving; "left" and "right" hand.*

## 57-1 The practice of righteousness

We have already seen how the righteousness of God brings salvation to the people of Israel, and pre-eminently in the Person of Jesus as the suffering servant of Isaiah. In his person there is a concentrated, focusing down of all the "many" of Israel into the "one". In this way he is the saving righteousness of God expressed through/in his person, for the rescue of his new covenant people.

Further, we noted how the response to this wonderful salvation worked in Jesus evoked a faith in people who received Jesus. We aid that this faith was a response to God's saving righteousness and God reckoned it, from His side of the covenant relationship, as our righteousness - an appropriate and pleasing response to His outgoing love.

Such a reconciliation with God that Jesus has established for us means that we have an access to Him as sons who are in relation to their heavenly Father. This model, or way of seeing it, is used throughout this sermon on the mount. It is this foundation of relationship that allows Jesus to teach his disciples of the radical new life-style that is possible. This is what he has been expressing - "but I say unto you..." as a sharp contrast - what was said to the ancients.

The change worked in these people of the new covenant arises through the changed relationship with the living God. Up to this point, Jesus has chosen to speak practically of the changed life of his disciples as it concerns their interaction with their neighbours in the world and their brothers within the new community. That is the major subject of Matthew 5.

Now He turns to their direct relations with God their Father.

## 56-2 Beware!

Jesus begins his teaching about this intimate and direct practice of righteousness - this response to God in prayer, almsgiving and fasting - with a warning. There is little doubt in the minds of us readers [5.20] that He speaks his warning to the disciples because they have been exposed to the bad example of the scribes and the Pharisees; having already pre-ambled his teaching

to the disciples that their righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees. Later in the Gospel, we shall see that Jesus describes them as “leaven” – a defiling influence that works its way into all the exchanges of God’s people with their God.

### 57-3 Who do you want to notice?

Jesus’ warning is founded on the understanding that the intimacy and the holy, exclusive relationship that each person has with God under the new covenant demands that there is a private and personal aspect to prayer, almsgiving and fasting. So, because of the exclusive nature of the relating involved, he warned that it is a place where the intrusion of others is not appropriate.

But the intrusion he warned them of was not because others were taking the initiative to break in on this relation with God, but because the disciples might compromise the purity of their desire to practice this righteousness by doing it to be noticed by fellow humans. They would be speaking to God but “before men”. He was warning them of this tempting compromise.

And this is what he meant when he spoke of “reward”. He was pointing to the value of the exchange; if the disciples were speaking to God, giving to the poor, or fasting, the whole meaning of it was caught up in doing it as ‘unto the Lord’. They were to have their eyes on Him with Whom they were conversing, not others.

If they spoke to God in public, in such a way as they had their own eyes really on the men around them; noting how they were impressed with what they said to God, then there was a value in that! It was that such men would be impressed. And the disciples would have become like them. They would be seeking the glory that comes from one another when they spoke to God [John 5.44]. All extempore, public praying runs this risk when it is not liturgical; that is, written out prayers that everyone speaks as a joint body of people; for liturgical prayer is common prayer.

### 57-4 Secret matter of almsgiving; “left” and “right” hand.

In these days of *electronic transfers* of monies, it is very difficult to directly debit something from an account and credit it into another’s without it being visible by all sorts of people. Further, these people have certain legitimate rights to know why such accounts are being transferred. There are accountants, government officials and others who need to understand that these movements of monies, if they are not commercial, then what are they? Such is the level of scrutiny in our exchanges of money that we need to take this into account in ap-

plying the teaching of Jesus.

Further, there are a *ways of giving* in the churches of God today that encourages the pledging of monies, and the use of direct, electronic debiting of accounts. All this serves to advertise what the left hand is doing to the right hand; and to anyone who has the desire to look. There is a diligence required if we are to give so as to keep it secret.

There are even *encouragements to give* which are based upon the fraudulent principle that it will benefit you, so that if you do give it away, you will get it back! This is a blatant appeal to self interest and is contrary to the whole understanding of giving as unto the Lord. Further, the way in which this principle is often attested is the open increase in wealth of the givers, which in turn becomes a further incentive to others. We have to understand what we are seeing here in the light of what Jesus' was teaching to his disciples.

## nt 58 – Matthew 6.5-15

Intimate and holy relations:

Praying in secret; praying to Father

*Read carefully Matthew 16.6,11; Mark 8.15; Luke 12.1;1 Corinthians 5.6*

58-1 *Secret matters – almsgiving and prayer*

58-2 *The openly discernable 'reward' or value.*

58-3 *" your Father, who is in secret"*

58-4 *"Not as the Gentiles do..."*

58-5 *"Pray then, in this way..."*

58-6 *"Our Father ...."*

58-7 *"who is in heaven" – then and now*

58-8 *Objectively addressing God while subjectively experiencing God*

58-9 *Hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done.*

58-10 *"Give us...forgive us...deliver us..."*

58-11 *"For yours is the kingdom, power and glory forever.*

### 58-1 Secret matters – almsgiving and prayer [6.2-6].

The only way out of this dangerous, religious compromise in the practice of their covenant responses to God was to do them in secret to the Lord. This is Jesus direct teaching for his disciples who live in a religious, man-centred

setting. Concerning almsgiving, and concerning prayer, it should be secret and unadulterated by the presence, or the knowledge, of others. These were not matters that called for anyone else's admission.

### 58-2 The openly discernable 'reward' or value.

If the actions, the prayers, the fasting and the almsgiving were secretly done, in the sense that they excluded the knowledge of others, then there would be an open result, discernable to the disciple who had prayed, fasted and given.

This visible 'reward' may be discernable by more people than just the worshipper, it is not made clear, but there will be some checkable, discernable issue that would mean the exchanges with God are real and have a true result in the real world.

Conversely, the hypocrites [6.2,5] also have a reward that is openly discernable; but it is not a reward from God but from men and women. It is the reward of persons noticing them, and thinking them wonderful because of what they do. And as the "full reward" it is the only reward that they get from their actions. So alms, prayers and fasting done in this way are totally disregarded by God.

Such persons who adulate these ones are themselves caught into a terrible web. They, on the one hand, encourage this religious hypocrisy, for they play the part of the audience for the hypocrites; and, on the other hand, are complicit in accepting the values that are so forwardly paraded [6.2] before them. The relationship operating between the parading hypocrites and watching congregation is a mutually rewarding one of self-glorification. But it is not regarded, nor rewarded, by God; that is the teaching of Jesus.

### 58-3 "...your Father who is in secret..."

One of the most radical matters that would be dawning on the people of the old covenant, as they observed the people of the new covenant, was that they really did know God personally and deeply. That "their Father" was someone who is "in secret", in a way that not all that was said to God was communally shared – "each shall know me" [Jeremiah 31.31].

Now, Jesus was speaking to a group. And the expression about "your" Father is in the plural at 6.1. This is appropriate to the context, for they were sitting around him. But the teaching here, whilst addressed to a group, is plainly about how *each person* of the group must activate and engage with God personally. And this is reflected by the way the Lord drops into the singular "you" for 6.2-4. Again, in the teaching on how to fast in 6.16 Jesus addresses them as a

plural group, and then in 6.17-18 drops into the singular “you”.

#### 58-4 “...not as the Gentiles do...”

In the section 6.7-8 Jesus, having warned the disciples about not following the example the hypocrites within Israel, and the way they defile prayer to the Father; he then turned their attention to another group that they should not emulate; it was the Gentiles.

Gentiles, in Jesus’ estimation and observation, use meaningless repetitions; saying things over and over again. This is because they see prayer as an obligation and also think that by praying they move their gods to hear them by their many words. So, in Jesus’ understanding, the Gentiles, by their prayer and its method, indicate that they are:

[1] seeking to get the attention of their god; they seek to be heard

[2] and they are they are looking to open the conversation by their own initiative

[3] and they are seeking to inform the god to whom they pray of their needs

On all of these counts the situation of the people of the new covenant, coming out of the Jewish old covenant base, is sharply different.

[1] They are not seeking to be heard, nor are they trying to get God’s attention. They are actually encouraged to “ask...seek...knock” [7.7-12] on the presupposition that their heavenly Father is good, and will give good things – things appropriate to His values – to those that ask Him. They are not wringing out of God things He is unwilling to give; it is the reverse.

[2] They are not opening the conversation: prayer for the people of the new covenant is a response to the outgoing love of God made clear to them in what He has already done for them. Their part is not to take an initiative with God, but to respond to His initiative. They speak back because they have already been spoken to. Their prayer, like their faith, is a response to the revelation already made by God who has spoken to them.

[3] They do not inform Him of their needs; they ask on the basis that children ask their fathers for the necessities of life. They have an in-built assumption in coming to ask that He knows their needs long before they ask Him. Their coming to ask does not establish the willingness of their Father to give, it is the presupposition in which their coming is based!

### 58-5 “Pray then in this way:...”

Jesus addressed them in the plural; his imperative “pray thus”, is addressed to them all as a corporate unit. So, if we were to think of this prayer as a model we might ask, “is it a prayer they should all pray together, or is it plural in its address simply because of the corporate setting, both in the actual sense of them sitting before him and also as a group who have just been compared and contrasted with the Gentiles?” Or, “may the prayer be said by an individual, in the secrecy of his own room, and yet using the prayer as a single person praying something to God which ‘we all’ could say”?

Or is it a model at all? That is, was Jesus speaking this prayer to list the subject matter which he thought appropriate, and brief, because it was not a using of ‘many words’. We may have to re-consider these questions in the light of the subject-matter, the order and the caveat he speaks of at the end [6.14-15].

One thing is for sure, it is an imperative – a command – that we should pray thus. It is not an option that we might pray, or as the mood might take us; it is required. This is at once an obligation as it is a blessing – for all of God’s commands to us, when obeyed, lead to a blessing. Jesus taught that we would speak to God; that we would converse with Him, and that we should respond, we may answer back – in the right sense – to the wonderful gracious initiative that He has spoken to us in His Son. It is not an option that we would not respond.

But like all of God’s commands, we are not left to ourselves to make it up as we see fit, we are given some instruction as to how to do it. For God does not leave us to risk our own thing here, He helps us to pray so that we may engage with Him. He provides for us the instruction of His only Son who, as truly God and truly man, also prayed to Him as a human worshipper. Jesus is also our High Priest, risen and ascended; He has established the access for us that we could not for ourselves.

### 58-6 “Our Father, ...”

To approach God and to address Him as “our Father” is to adopt the stance of children, of sons of God [5.9,45]. This is no presumption; it is the place He has made for us through his Son; it is an access that has been opened to us at great cost. Also, to call Him ‘Father’ is to accept Jesus’ help in approaching Him so as to relate to Him properly and speak appropriately.

And we would speak of “our” Father to Him, even if we were alone in private, because the expression “my Father” is reserved, as we see in our Lord’s usage, for the relation of His only Son [7.21]. While it is the case that all our praying to the Father is “through Jesus Christ”, it is also true that we worship

Christ as Lord and our God. He is both the One *through* Whom we pray and the One *to* Whom we pray. So we would be right to not stray from the “our”, even in our personal solitude.

This prayer expresses for us that God is “our” Father, in the corporate sense; and this is so long before I, myself, might address Him personally. So to call Him “our” Father, even in private prayer, reminds each of us that each of us is one of his new covenant people. This would run true for the “give us” and the “forgive us” and the “deliver us” of the later requests. Each of us would not want to be given ‘my’ bread if my brethren are not receiving also their daily bread, nor forgiven or delivered if they are not.

### 58-7 “...who is in heaven...”- then and now

When Matthew and the other Gospel authors wrote down the things as they happened, they were, of course, recording it after the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord. It is also after the sending of the Spirit. So, when we, as readers, approach this sermon on the mount, we are aware that the recorded teaching of Jesus to the disciples anticipated the full work that He accomplished. It was upon this basis that all of his teaching was given. It was because the whole of His word and works inhered in his Person.

We, the readers, have come to know God after the full matters of Jesus life have been accomplished. So we can think of his life as a block of past time - as the Gospel writers do. The disciples who listened to Him in the flesh did not have that perspective. They had the person of Jesus present to them, and it was in his person that the kingdom was centred, whether they were thinking past, present or future. If He told them to “pray this way” then they would, even if that meant that the basis for such praying might come ‘later’, so to speak.

[1] At the time Jesus delivered this teaching, the disciples could have used this prayer straight away. For they were being taught by their Rabbi a way to address God in heaven as their Father, as well as how and what to ask according to His will. They could address the Father even while they had the Son with them, on the earth. At that time, such a prayer was an address to the Father through the Son – Who was, from their immediate perspective, their Teacher/ Rabbi and so their mediator. Mediator, in the sense that as their rabbi, they obeyed his word to them, took his teaching on board and spoke out to God as their ‘father’ on that basis.

No matter that ‘later’, they would deepen that sense of mediation to be aware of him as Son of God, and that after his finished work became known to them, would know that they approach God the Father through the Mediator – His Son, who they knew as their rabbi.

[2] After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus and His sending of the Holy Spirit we have the church of the new covenant made up of Jews and Gentiles. This prayer would be used in full awareness that the Father and the Son - their ascended Lord - are co-reigning in heaven; Satan has been driven out of heaven at the ascension [Revelation 12] and is now upon the earth as a defeated and desperate foe. In that sense the prayer, as we pray it now, is prayed to the Father in whose presence the Son now stands all victorious.

We then pray it to the Father from a position of His children, who are stationed on the earth as citizens in an alien country, into which our enemy has been thrown down. We are awaiting the arrival of the coming of Jesus to the earth again to truly restore all things as we understand them to have already been restored in heaven.

## 58-8 Objectively addressing God while subjectively, experiencing God.

[1] In human life no one can get into someone else's skin. When we have a conversation with someone we know, as we address them we know them as someone 'outside' ourselves – objective to us. It is true, we might have a mental picture of them that we keep, such as when they go away and are objectively, 'not there'. But in our thinking about them when they are present, - even if on the telephone, which is talk with someone without sight, but who is 'there' nevertheless - we speak to them in this objective way.

We address God as our Father as we stand upon the earth as a Person who is "in heaven". We do not see Him, for He is spirit – no one has ever seen God. He is not available to our sight, as, in the same way, when our Lord was taken up "into heaven", he also passed behind the clouds into the presence of God and so from the apostle's sight.

So, *in our thinking* about the Father, Whom we are addressing as "in heaven", we recognize that, we are to address God as Someone objective to us; nevertheless Jesus taught us to address our Father as not standing before us. He is not "here" in the sense that we might imagine ourselves as standing before Him present to us on the earth as we are to Him. That is not the way the Lord taught his disciples to think as they spoke to the Father in heaven; as if they were conjuring up his presence before them. The disciples were to speak to God objectively thinking of Father as truly God but as 'in heaven'.

[2] Now, just as no one can get into your skin and be who you are, nevertheless we must grapple with what Jesus taught a woman of Samaria, beside

a well, during a conversation they had at midday. During a discussion as to 'where' God was properly to be worshipped, Jesus made clear to her that the location was not important. He told her that "God is spirit" and that we must worship Him in spirit and truth.

Now, is it possible for God Himself, as Spirit, to enter our bodies in such a way that, while we do not become Him, nor He us, He can give us the subjective experience of His presence within us? The answer to that is surely "Yes" and, as we have seen in nt 48/1 and 48/2, it is totally consistent with the promise of Ezekiel and Jeremiah concerning the coming of the new covenant to Israel and, through the concentrating of Israel's promise onto the person of Jesus as their Messiah, to the Gentiles.

So, for us, as Christian readers of the Gospels, reading after the resurrection and ascension, *in our personal subjective experience*, we know that the Father and the Son have taken up residence in our persons. They have made their home in us by the coming of the Spirit. Each of us has become a dwelling place for God [John 14.2,17, 23, 25-6 and 16.13-15]. The power of this dwelling of God, the Spirit, in our persons is that it conveys to us the strengthening comfort of being known by God and that our communion with Him is in the Spirit. So we find the relationship we have with the Lord is, from His side, conveyed to us through His Spirit and, from our side, this is registered deep within our person and conscience. Indeed, in our praying, Paul teaches us, the Holy Spirit helps. As the Person of the Trinity resident with us on the earth, He empowers us to pray; and from His Communion within the Trinity our prayers are drawn up into the exchanges of the very life of God. This is the main drift of the teaching of Paul in Romans 8.26-27.

So, when we pray, we need to distinguish the internal subjective experience we have of God's communion with us from the external, speaking out to God, which is prayer. In speaking out to God, He is understood in our thinking as being outside of us, objective to us and in the teaching of Jesus as "in heaven". We would never pray to the God who is within us – even though we are in communion with Him. If we must use 'location language' we speak to Him as objective to us and in heaven. In this way our relationship with the One to Whom we speak is secure – because it is outside of ourselves, our faith is centred upon God the Father, who is "in heaven".

## 58-9 "hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

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As we noted above, the woman of Samaria had been accustomed to

think, in the light of a long running dispute between Jews and Samaritans, that God must be worshiped in a particular place. The location was important for her. Jesus corrected her that the about this; he said it was not the issue. The nature of God as spirit settled that it was not a matter of place.

In the Old Testament, we have a record of the building of the Temple of the Lord by King Solomon, after his father David had assembled the necessary building materials for it. When he had finished it, he prayed a prayer to the Lord, in which he made clear that God was not located in, much less contained by, a building such as he had built. Solomon's way of expressing that truth was that to use an expression God had taught Israel to use; it was that God had caused "His Name to dwell there". It was a way of speaking how God truly heard the prayers uttered towards 'this place', and yet in a way that guarded the praying people from a pagan or simplistic view that God, who is 'spirit', was "there" in a simple, locatable, or worse, an imagined, sense.

So here, in the Lord's prayer, we are speaking to God who is "in heaven" – and so not seen by us, for He is spirit. But in speaking of Him in this way, we, who are upon the earth, hallow – declare as a holy and sacred matter - His "name". That is, to be praying as earthlings, we must be aware that we hold sacred the Name of our God, using that expression as He taught us – and our Lord is now teaching the Jewish men [familiar with this way of speech] who were his disciples.

So, in hallowing his Name, we are to revere the one to Whom we pray as our Father. In this way we recognize Him to be a holy Father, a father is relation to his children, but yet a father who is to be respected, revered and treated as the arbiter of what we, as his children, are to do in obedience to him. He is a Father with a moral bite! When we see it like that, we can see how obviously the next petitions follow.

For the disciples who first heard this, and began to pray it while Jesus was with them, their understanding of the coming of the kingdom would have centred in the Lord Himself, as present among them. We, who live this side of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus apply this in the same way, it centres for us also on Jesus and the kingdom of God He established and applied to the heavenly realms.

We are asking that his rule, or reign, will come on the earth as it has already done so in heaven. We long to see the ruling authority of our Father being expressed over all the earth in the way that it has come so totally in heaven at the ascension of the Lord [Revelation 12].

Further, the expression of the will of God is the rule of God in practice. So we are, as children of our Father, asking Him that the earth would come under the sway of his own will. We so love Him, and find his will for us so at-

tractive and beneficent that we want to see it come in practice over the earth. This is not something we ask primarily for the sake of the earth, or of other earthlings, but as we shall see in a later section, it is for the glory belongs to our Father, we are praying for his justification as His rule rightly comes to the earth. We are praying for the rectification of His glory over his created earth as already it has come in heaven.

So, insofar that the ascension of the Lord Jesus brought this rectification into heavenly realms, and that Satan was cast out of heaven as a result, we find that we are praying for the 'coming again' of the Lord Jesus to the earth so that Father's will and kingdom will arrive here in its totality. Our prayer's to the Father about his rule can only be answered in the same way as it was for the early disciples who gathered around their Rabbi – it will be the Rabbi's work. For them, there and then, it was dependent on their rabbi's first, humble, mysterious and degrading coming; for us, here and now, it is dependent on the rabbi's glorious, open and exalted coming again.

## 58-10 "give us...forgive us...deliver us..."

Meanwhile, we are praying people who are upon the earth as those who, like children asking our father for our lunch and money for the bus, are so dependent on Him as we live just one day at a time.

For our prayers about his kingdom and rule are looking forward to the absolute establishment and glory for Him – and so we live in between the times of the ascension of the lord [what He has already established] and the coming again [what He will establish and for which we have just prayed] of the Lord Jesus.

Living between the 'comings', we are God's children, whose share in the sufferings of our Lord are conforming us to his image. We are going to share his glory as we share in his sufferings. So in our dependency we ask for what Father thinks is enough for us each day, where we live on the earth.

The resurrected and exalted Lord has drawn our life into the heavenly realms with Him. So we are on the earth, participating in His risen life already; we know Him to be our righteousness and redemption. So, here, in between the 'comings', still embroiled with the sinful life of the earth, and still grappling with the lusts of the flesh that assail us, we are sinners and righteous both at once. Before the Lord, as we stand under his gaze, we hear and believe his word that He sees us as righteous in his sight because He sees us "in His Son".

We know that God is not counting our sins against us, and we are secure in the fullness of the satisfaction that Christ has brought to the Father's

heart about that matter. His sacrifice has satisfied father's conscience about our rebellion. When we were once far off and enemies of God yet, in his Beloved Son, we have been brought near. That we are praying at all – and that He commands us to pray – tells us that we are reconciled to Him through Christ. So, in that safety, we are bold to openly confess all our sins without fear of his wrath, and we are bolder in our access to Him to ask Him to forgive us our sins. This we ask each day.

Given that the Lord has brought the rule of God into heaven, and Satan has been cast to the earth knowing that his time is short, we live under a foe who is stronger than us. He still oppresses those who are upon the earth, and especially God's little ones, such as we are. We, as long as we are here, are required, not to take enemy territory from the devil, but are required to stand, clothed in Christ, who is the armour of God to us. He is our safety, we creep into Him, keeping our eyes upon Him, trusting Him. So we are asking of our Father, who trusts us to stand, that He would deliver us from the evil one. We need that deliverance every day.

So these three petitions, provision, forgiveness and protection, of Christian people are asked of their Father. We are asking, in deep dependency, as creatures and dear children, for provision for ongoing bodily life. We are staying open to Father about our sin, and since He alone can inform us of what displeases Him via his Spirit within us, that He would forgive us. This maintains our relation is true to our earthly compromised existence. We are asking for his protection - to be delivered from our enemy, from whom we have been set free as to our persons; but who has become our mortal enemy because we are disciples of the Lord who conquered him. He has opportunity to oppress us in his desparation – our Father will deliver us.

## 58-11 For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever

We are asking this prayer of our Father because we long to see our Father's vindication to be established before all the peoples of the earth. And this is not just because we choose to exercise our will in this way; as if asking through some arbitrary whim of our own. It is our conviction, implanted in our rectified consciences that this is to be asked of our Father because it is right and true. It is our Father's will – and we ask Him to do his will because He has drawn us into His life.

That such a prayer could be prayed on the earth by human beings is the most powerful exercise of their shared life with the Father that there could be.

Father and his children are declared, as we pray such a prayer, to be one.

## 58-12 For if you forgive others...your heavenly Father forgives you

The “if” ... “if” form of verses 14-15 indicates a logical sequence. [What the grammarians call a third class condition]. It describes a contingency where the forgiveness of the one implies the forgiveness of the other.

The forgiveness that we know from God our Father is to be expressed in the forgiveness of those who wrong us. As we take God at his word about our own standing before Him this is a simple act of faith, we trust his word to us. Then, as faith in God’s word for ourselves begins to work, it comes out in love towards our neighbour. For love of our neighbour is the product of our faith – “faith working through love.” Faith in God is a matter of our person, love is the work; it results from this faith working out towards our neighbour. In this way, the reality of our faith in God finds expression in our forgiveness to our neighbour.

Another way of stating this, often used, is to think of our relation to God as the vertical, and our relationships with our neighbour as the horizontal, human-human exchanges. What this is saying is that as God in his acceptance and grace forgives us freely [although not cheaply to Him!] so our reconciled relation to Him sets our love towards our neighbour to forgive him his wrongs against us. Everything that we are given in relation to the vertical relation, finds its expression in the horizontal relationships. This is succinctly said throughout the letter 1 John [2.9; 3.10-11, 16-18; 4.7,19-21].

# nt 59 – Matthew 6.16-18

## Living to men or Father: fasting

*Read carefully Isaiah 58; Matthew 10.41-2*

59-1 *A Christian orientation to fasting*

59-2 *“when you fast...”[verse 16]*

59-3 *“...your Father who is in secret...”*

59-4 *...when you, personally, fast...*

59-5 *“...your reward...”*

## 59-1 A Christian orientation to fasting.

### 1. Proclaiming a public fast in the Old Testament.

Israel, secure in knowing the covenant commitment of God to them, sometimes found themselves in a place where it became clear, usually through encountering hard times, that God was not pleased with them. On such an occasion, in the face of extreme difficulties, their leaders proclaimed a public fast. They often accompanied this wearing sackcloth and put ashes on their heads – a way of humbling themselves expressed by their clothing and their position. Such abasement was a way of expressing to the Lord that they were at His feet and awaiting what He might do and say. Repentance was the dominant theme of these fasts.

Reading their relational situation of the time from the historical things that were happening to them, Israel, ceased eating and turned her attention towards the Lord. Under such conditions, she longed for His word to make clear what the offending issues were, so that she could return to obedience. Her fasting was a powerful way of admitting to themselves, and to the Lord, that their life was dependent on God's word to them, rather than on food and drink. God's word, was always their life, as it is ours, but through fasting they gave extreme expression to that truth.

It was, of course, the very grace of God which established that they could be brought back into obedience, and that they were maintained in their relation to Him. The repentance and fasting arose because He drew them back from the wayward ways. He never abandoned them for He was a covenant-keeping God in tandem with a covenant-breaking people.

### 2. A mistake – a misreading of grace

Yet Israel, in her waywardness, like all who think it is their work that counts with God, drew a conclusion that it was her prayer and fasting that caused God to listen. They began to think that they got his attention through their efforts of self-abasement. So they made a mistake. They began to fast as a way to get God's attention, and so get their voice, and their own interests heard by God. They thought that they could break in on God and get his attention; they pressed in on Him so as to manipulate Him. [It is the same thought of the hunger strikes today – a manipulative tool to get a more powerful group to do what a weaker group wants by threatening to die so as to blame the others.] It is this form of fasting which the prophet Isaiah declares is fasting that God

hates; it is the very reverse of a submissive and repentant people The Lord disapproves, for it is self-referred and self seeking [Isaiah 58.3-5].

### 3. Other-centred fasting.

True fasting is the fasting which directs itself away from self seeking to the caring for the down trodden and those who need care [Isaiah 58.6-12 ]. It then has the statement to God that we are ceasing to eat because we are so moved by the love for others, that we want to show Him that our life is on the line in our asking for him to act on their behalf. But not even this is the issue. Isaiah makes clear that we are the actors ourselves. It is not a matter of sack-cloth, ashes and cease eating, fasting means to act. We are to care for the poor and the widows and those who are defenceless. We are the ones to share our bread with the hungry and to cover the naked.

Now this describes a “way of life” as a “fast”. Further, it makes clear that fasting here is about caring for others, it is other-centred [as God Himself is], and so it is a denial of the self-centred life of man. Isaiah 61. 1-2a open for us the same material.

### 4. The Lords Humiliation.

Phil 2.5-11 is a way of understanding the Lord laying down His glory and life and becoming poor so that we might become rich.

### 5. The Lord's Baptism

This was where the Lord took his place with the sinners of the earth, and in response to the preaching of John the Baptist, went down into the Jordan. Then what follows is the fasting in the wilderness, by the appointment of the Holy Spirit and the encounter with the devil, who, repeating the statement of the voice from heaven, “thou art my beloved Son..” then challenges Jesus to go a different and easier way than self-denial, the way of fasting [= standing with sinners and caring for them, so that they can go free].

### 6. Fasting today.

We would never fast today to make our voice heard on high. This was the mistake of the ones mentioned in Isaiah. Rather, we fast [as a participation in Jesus' fasting [humiliation]; always bearing about the death of Jesus [2 Corinthians 4.7-12].

### 7. After the death and Ascension of the Lord.

The text “Why don't your disciples fast” brings the reply that they will

fast on that day when the bridegroom is taken away from them. [Death? Ascension?] So that the life of the church as a fast, which is the caring for the poor etc, begins after the cross and is an understanding of the death life which the Lord has introduced us to by His own death.

#### 8. Fasting out of acknowledged weakness

In the Acts of the Apostles, as the leaders set apart Barnabas and Saul for the world to which the Lord, the Holy Spirit, had called them. They laid hands upon them with fasting and prayer. Here, we recognise that the fasting is associated with the humble position of needing the power of God to complete the task which He has set them to do.

They are serious about the work, and they are fasting for power to do it. They seek the Lord's empowerment here.

### 59-2 When you fast...

Jesus, speaking to Jewish men whose lives had been formed by the traditions of their elders handed down, is assuming that they will fast. But, as He instructed them about the almsgiving and prayers, these were to be secretly done, in the sense that they excluded the knowledge of others, then there would be an open result, discernable to the disciple who had prayed, fasted and given.

This visible 'reward' may be discernable by more people than just the worshipper, it is not made clear, but there will be some checkable, discernable issue that would mean the exchanges with God are real and have a true result in the real world.

Conversely, the hypocrites [6.2,5] also have a reward that is openly discernable; but it is not a reward from God but from men and women. It is the reward of persons noticing them, and thinking them wonderful because of what they do. And as the "full reward" it is the only reward that they get from their actions. So alms, prayers and fasting done in this way are totally disregarded by God.

Such persons who adulate these ones are themselves caught into a terrible web. They, on the one hand, encourage this religious hypocrisy, for they play the part of the audience for the hypocrites; and, on the other hand, are complicit in accepting the values that are so forwardly paraded [6.2] before them. The relationship operating between the parading hypocrites and watching congregation is a mutually rewarding one of self-glorification. But it is not regarded, nor rewarded, by God; that is the teaching of Jesus.

### 59-3 “...your Father who is in secret...”

One of the most radical matters that would be dawning on the people of the old covenant, as they observed the people of the new covenant, was that they really did know God personally and deeply. That “their Father” was someone who is “in secret”, in a way that not all that was said to God was communally shared – “each shall know me” [Jeremiah 31.31].

Now, Jesus was speaking to a group. And the expression about “your” Father is in the plural at 6.1. This is appropriate to the context, for they were sitting around him. But the teaching here, whilst addressed to a group, is plainly about how *each person* of the group must activate and engage with God personally. And this is reflected by the way the Lord drops into the singular “you” for 6.2-4. Again, in the teaching on how to fast in 6.16 Jesus addresses them as a plural group, and then in 6.17-18 drops into the singular “you”.

### 59-4 “...but when you, personally, fast...”

As we have noticed, the ‘you’ [plural] of verse 17 has now moved to the singular. This is now addressed to of the disciples personally. Jesus wants us to fast, and by that we may think of not eating for a time, in such a way that our face is fresh, washed and not showing any outward signs of the fasting we are doing secretly towards our Father.

This is not designed to be deceptive, but holy. It is to make clear that this fasting is directed towards our Father, as a matter strictly between us and Him – and no one else. So, we are not thinking here of the ‘publically proclaimed fast’ of *nt59-1.1* above.

### 59-5 “...your [personal] reward...”

We are not to think here of a ‘reward’ as something given as a payment for the fasting done. Rather, ‘reward’ here is a result, but a result conditioned in a particular way. It is the result of your fast in respect of the Person before whom you did it secretly. So that rewards of grace, as we might speak of it, are the products that come to us as we express the common life with God our Father, into which we have been drawn. They are results which are appropriate to such a relationship.

You see the same expression in the Gospels where it is said that “...he who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet receives a prophet’s reward...” [*nt 76, Matthew 10.41*]. It comes to mean that, if you receive the person of the prophet as a true prophet – one who speaks God’s word – then you will receive the reward of a prophet – which is you will hear God’s word to you. In this case

the reception of the person and the receiving of God's word is the reward of treating that person for who he is before God.

What are the rewards of treating God as a Father, in such a way as a son who lives for Him only in the matters of almsgiving, prayer and fasting. The answer will be along the lines of the experience of holy intimacy. For all these activities amount to shared privacy with God about the deep things of the heart expressed before Him in relation to others.

## nt 60 – Matthew 6.19-34

True treasure; sound eye; one master;  
anxiety

*Read carefully Luke 11.33-34, 12.22-24; 16.13;*

*60-1 Terrible connection between treasure and the heart*

*60-2 "The lamp of the body..."*

*60-3 "...cannot serve two masters..."*

*60-4 ...because of this...*

*60-5 "...tomorrow..."*

### 60-1 Connection between the treasure and the heart.

The contrast between earthly and heavenly treasure is that the former is subject to decay and theft by other men and women while the latter is permanently safe. Earthly treasure is subject to loss, and so is not a thing to give your heart away to. And therein lies the terrible possibility of earthly treasure. It has to do with the principle that where your treasure is there your heart is also. And that can now mean that the human heart can be wedded to treasure that cannot last, nor may be permanently safe. This means that something of no eternal or permanent value, could be the means of losing something which is of such value. We can lose our heart to what is not worthy of our heart's own value. It is this danger that underlies Jesus prohibition, "...do not store up for yourselves treasure on the earth..."; the unmistakable implication is that if you do, it will endanger your life, which is worth far more and has, by God's creation, an eternal destiny.

## 60-2 The lamp of the body...

In this picture which Jesus uses, we need to see that the eye is not thought of as a lamp emitting light to the outside, but as a gateway into the inner man. So the implication of the eye being sound, is that the whole body will be full of light. Conversely, if the eyes are unsound, then the whole inner life of the man is plunged into darkness.

If that were the case, then if the only light you have is really a darkness, that is a great darkness; great because it is totally unrelieved by any light.

This has to do with "seeing" in such a way that the inner life of each person is enlightened; it has the light which comes from outside it to illumine itself. Such an image speaks of a light that comes from an origin outside the person themselves. It speaks of an enlightenment that can only be given from without, and which must come through eyes that are given to see.

Each of us needs the light of God to fall on the hidden recesses of our heart in such a way that if it did, it would let us see what God's light brings to light, and also that it would mean that we have eyes to so see it also given to us.

Revelation then, that has the effect of giving us a firm inner foundation of how we are seen in God's sight, and so how we can bear to see the inner things of our own life exposed is a gift from outside ourselves, and comes with the given ability to appropriate it as well.

## 60-3 "...cannot serve two masters..."

The radical nature of Jesus' call to discipleship is that of obedience to a master as a committed servant. But the picture behind the verb for "serve" is of a 'slave' in the first century sense. A master's servant [and property] and therefore no one else's. This is a call to settle in our minds the impossibility of serving any other master. The language is of 'love' or 'hate', being 'devoted' or 'despising' - it is not simply desirable it is not possible; mastership is exclusive of all other masters.

The master that Jesus has in view here is money or wealth. He teaches that it is the nature of wealth to master the person who has accumulated it. It is not a controllable matter it would seem. So here He calls for a decisive choice – the one or the other. It cannot be God and money; we must choose between them as between lords, it is either/or.

## 60-4 "...because of this..."

This principle that Jesus has spoken out concerning exclusively God or mammon [money] becomes the basis for the exhortation not to be anxious

about food and drink, clothing and bodily needs.

[a] He argues from the lesser to the greater: if the birds of the air are fed by our heavenly Father, how much more shall we expect Him to feed us. Has He not in the Lord's prayer taught us to call on our Father for our daily bread. Since the birds are worth less than us humans, how much more would God feed us.

[b] He argues about the fruitlessness of anxious thought. It cannot achieve anything by it being thought about. Thinking, willing, and mind effort does not achieve any change.

[c] He returns to the created, wild lilies of the field and the grass of the fields; they surpass Solomon's clothing; God's gift to them.

[d] He states that anxiety is a failure to trust our heavenly Father for basic bodily needs. This is not appropriate for the children of Israel, who have had long experience of dependency on God and seen their lives preserved and their needs met. The Gentiles are those who worry as a life style, not Israel.

[e] Our Father knows our needs before we ask for them. It is the relationship of a caring Father to his children that informs Him of what should be provided; the children do not have to be alarmed for themselves. That would be to change their relation to their Father and to take over his side of the relationship.

[f] If they are to be children of their Father in this matter, it is not food and drink that is to be their concern. Their minds should seek His kingdom –reign, present rule – and His righteousness. This directs us to the grounds of the relationship which we have with God such that we can call Him Father at all. Has not his kingdom come in Christ such that his rule now draws our hearts to trust Him, for our faith is the only thing that can give Him his due as Father. And with the coming of such a kingdom He has granted us a righteousness; for He sees us in the Beloved Son; and in such as way that before God this One is our righteousness.

To seek for the kingdom and His righteousness is to have everything else - for if God has given us His Son, will He not give us everything else.

And we may 'seek' that. And we shall find in our seeking that it is without anxiety for it is a gift. It is the gift with which everything else comes.

## 60-5 "...tomorrow..."

The importance of living one day at a time is that this is where God has set us in history and time. We are people who live under the immanent return of the Lord, and of anything that God chooses to do today. As children, our Father bids us, through His Son, to live one day at a time.

# nt 61 – Matthew 7.1-5

## The hypocrisy of judging others

*Read carefully Luke 6.37-38,41-42; Mark 4.24*

*61-1 Do not judge, in order that you may not be judged*

*61-2 It is morally hypocritical*

*61-3 The inability to see clearly*

*61-4 Disciples of Jesus are to be sure of their own need*

### 61-1 Do not judge, in order that you may not be judged.

There are 'judgments' that we all must make which amount to discernment about matters we come across. That is, we are exercising a critical faculty about ideas, truths and those things presented to us in the circumstances of life. This is not what is meant here.

What is meant here is the judgement of *persons* in the sense of the condemnation of them. That is where we set ourselves up as the judge of our neighbour and so we arrogate to ourselves the place of God towards a fellow creature. For what transpires from this judgment passed on another is that the same criteria, the same 'measure', with which we judged them will be the measure by which we ourselves shall be judged.

Behind this idea is the understanding that we have taken the place of the Judge. In doing that we have acted as if, like Him, we are consistent in the very character and things as He is. For He judges us according to the measure that He himself sets and lives by.

This is the first reason why we should not pass judgement on other people. It is the adoption of a relation towards them that Another only can occupy.

### 61-2 It is morally hypocritical

The second reason why we should not do this judging is because we are compromised people ourselves and, being so, we are not able to see clearly so as to judge aright. It is hypocritical to look at a very small sawdust in the eye of another when we have a plank in our own eye. That is, we are looking to assess another when we have a much larger matter which compromises our own position. Our own fault is greater and more obvious.

### 61-3 The inability to see clearly to relieve another

The third objection of Jesus is that we cannot even see clearly so as to assess the smaller matter of another when we have the blurred vision of the presence of a greater fault within ourselves. We must first be free of our own impediment and then we shall see clearly to attend to our brother's eye. So he is directing that, in the issue of correcting another, or judging them at all, we must first attend to our own impediments before we attempt to help others. To think otherwise is hypocritical.

### 61-4 Disciples of Jesus are to be sure of their own need

If there is anything that Jesus desires his disciples in their attitudes towards others, it is to understand that they are recipients of grace. That he has called them to himself aware of, and despite their faults that come with them. They all understood that they were not selected to follow him because they possessed godly life – it was the other way around, they had been called to share in His life as those who did not have that life for and in themselves. They would find out what they would become as they attended to their rabbi and shared his life.

Jesus knew that the scribes and Pharisees were always presenting as the judges of their neighbours. That they were constantly telling others of their faults and what they should be doing. They turned out to be blind to their own errors and faults. So they were blind guides. They led others astray by virtue of their own life – it stumbled many.

## nt 62 – Matthew 7.6

### Discernment about using holy treasure

*Read carefully*

*62-1 Holy relations*

*62-2 The need for discernment*

*62-3 The way to live is to be circumspect*

### 62-1 Holy relations.

This is the other side of not judging others. We are to be aware that

there are matters of the kingdom, and of the great pearl which we have come to value in the gospel of the kingdom of God; it has led us into holy relations with God as our Father and we as his sons. Within this teaching of Jesus on the Mount, we have seen that He has been speaking of a righteousness that comes to his disciples as a gift.

He has been speaking of how the kingdom brings the blessedness of satisfaction of all the godly hunger that they have had – a hunger, I take it, that had been planted there by God. And he has called his disciples blessed because theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

He has been teaching how to practice that righteousness, as a secret matter, in religious practice between themselves and their Father in secret. He has made clear the sonship that they have, so that they now live according to the relation with their heavenly Father; they are to be like Him [perfect] which is a full human maturity.

## 62-2 The need for discernment

But it is clear that when people do not value those things that we know, nor are able to measure their worth, such as we know them in relation to our Father that we must not expose these holy relations to being trampled under feet as if nothing worth.

## 62-3 The way to live in this case is to not cast them before folks

The remedy, the way to live with such secret treasure is to not cast it down before people as a common thing, when in fact it is a holy, precious secret matter. To do that its to cast something of inestimable value to you [pearl] before those who cannot have any understanding of such things [pigs]. All that can result from this action is that the lovely thing is dishonoured and defiled.

So, we are to be circumspect about speaking with those who show no knowledge of the kingdom of God; we are not to reveal such beautiful things as we share in God to them, as if they would appreciate them. That is to expose our relation of God with us to ridicule.

## nt 63 – Matthew 7.7-12

Encouragement to ask our Father.

Extending to others what you would ask of them.

*Read carefully Luke 6.31; 11.9-1; John 16.25-27*

*63-1 Ask, seek and knock*

*63-2 The privilege of initiative*

*63-3 Treat others the way you would have them treat you*

### 63-1 Ask, seek and knock

Here is a wonderful proof of the holy relationship which we have entered. It is right to say that in all things God is the initiator and we are those whose position is to respond. Adam, in rebellion against God, took the initiative and attempted to lead the relationship, and so usurped the place of God and found that his relation was lost and broken.

Here, in these three images we have a promise of God to us that if we ask of Him he will give, if we seek from Him we will find, and if we knock and seek entry to Him He will open to us. He will meet our questions and give what we ask, He is accessible to be sought after and guarantees that we will find Him in the relationship, and He will be accessible to us whenever we knock. He will not hide from us.

These three inter-related statements teach one issue. If you take an initiative with God about a matter He will be there and will respond to you in such a way as your initiative is fruitful in your quest.

### 63-2 The privilege of initiative

But we must be clear. Asking and seeking and knocking are actions we may take only because we have first been found by Him and brought into a relationship of true sons, where such exchanges are possible. No one can find God by themselves; they can respond to Him finding them for themselves, but it would not be a matter of digging Him out by themselves.

However, once we have been found, we enter a dialogue with our

Father, where He will speak and we will answer, and also, wonder of wonders, we can take an initiative and speak and He will answer. There is true, two-way initiative and response here.

This teaching of Jesus is that the Father, precisely because He is truly our Father, will be a true Father. Even bad earthly fathers, do not give us stones when asked for bread or a snake when asked for fish. How much more may we count upon the fatherly response of our Father in heaven?

### 63-3 Treat others as you would have them treat you

True sons of the kingdom of God have found themselves as God has brought them home and lived in relation with them. Their minds have been renewed and have taken on a sense of their worth before God. They are those who know who they are.

As they have adapted to this amazing view of themselves, learned in relation with the living God, known as their Father, these sons are adapting, more and more to this privileged position. They know themselves treated by God as ones of great worth, deeply loved of the Father before the foundation of the world.

This knowledge, which is only learned of themselves in relation to their Father, is too wonderful for them. It transforms their own view of themselves and also of their neighbours. In such a high view of their own life they are growing accustomed to extend to others the same value, as they think of them as their Father has taught them He thinks of his creatures made in the image of His Son. So, they transfer this high view of humanity out into the world. Wherever they go they do not think of themselves as better, or in some sense greater than others. Rather, they want to treat others as they themselves want to be treated by them. For they know who they are and they would wish others to be treated by them as they know them to be.

This fulfills the law and the prophets.

# nt 64 – Matthew 7.13-14

## Two ways: a narrow entrance and a broad way

*Read carefully Luke 13.24; John 10*

64-1 Enter

64-2 It's about the few and the many

64-3 It's about destruction or life

### 64-1 Enter

Thinking of an entry “from” we usually picture a gate, a doorway or vestibule that marks a movement from a common and generally accessible, shared road into something which is private property, and so not common. Such an entrance is a departure from the old, common way we have been travelling, it is a leaving of that flow. It marks a halt and a turning aside from that way.

Thinking of an entry “to” we understand the entry point to be a beginning of something which is yet to be fully explored. We have entered, but there is more to know.

### 64-2 A narrow entrance, a broad way, is about few and many

The contrast between a narrow entrance and a broad way is of course, a contrast of numbers. A broad way accommodates many and allows for a great number to traverse it.

We should not be put off by the numbers difference. One of the central themes of the gospel is that this gracious message of God, which sets our conscience free, by hearing of God's acceptance of us in Jesus, is a matter of one person at a time. It is that God desires each of us, personally, and so it must be a narrow gate as opposed to a broad way.

Every Christian knows that the world – to use a term John's Gospel majors upon – is alien to the life of God. And that the word of God, as it is received by us, separates us from the world. It does this, not by taking us out of the world, but by causing us to be renovated and changed – born anew. In this sense, we are not “of the world”, we do not have our life from the world nor our beginnings

there either.

So we are not taken from it but put back into the world as those who are not of the world.

## 64-3 A narrow entrance, a broad way, is about destruction and life

The contrast is about perdition and life. This is the issue of the word of God as spoken to us by Jesus. He points us to the stark contrasts and choices that the gospel confronts us with. Will it be destruction, to which the vast number are going towards, or will it be the unique gateway, which is narrow, that leads to life.

To take up our image of the “world” again. The world is heading to destruction, for it is hostile to God and, along with this hostility to Jesus, it opposes, pressures and harasses Christians. In such a way that they have a peace from Jesus even while they experience the tribulation – the pressure - of the world around them.

# nt 65 – Matthew 7.15-27

## True disciples: four characteristic tests

*Read carefully Luke 6.43-44; 13.25-27; 6.47-49.*

*65-1 From the world to the sheepfold*

*65-2 Beware of false prophets among the sheep – the test of life*

*65-3 Familiarity with Jesus – the test of obedience to Father*

*65-4 Statements people make as to their certainty of knowing Jesus*

*65-5 On that day: works done in the name – does Jesus confess them?*

*65-6 Heeding God’s word right now, spoken through His Son*

## 65-1 From the world to the sheepfold

There is a movement from the broad thoroughfare of the vast majority of men and women of the world into and through an entrance of a narrow way, suitable for each person to traverse one at a time.

We arrive, not so much into a place as a community of God’s people. We find ourselves having left the world and come among those who experience

the life of God and have found within themselves the peace of their own conscience and, as a result, a reconciliation with God that draws them to love Him freely and experience the joy of serving Him, free of self-interest. So for the first time, there are good works – works of God - that issue from changed lives. Such is the fruit of sharing in the very life of God as sons. This is a fruit of works done.

There is also the change of character that takes place as sons mature they grow more and more like their heavenly Father. They are ‘becoming’ like their elder Brother Jesus, and so as sons of God they are developing a character and a heart like his, both in relation to their Father and to the brothers and sisters around them – the other “little ones” of Jesus. This is the fruit of character.

## 65-2 Beware of false prophets among the sheep – the test of life

But the community of the narrow gate are not drawn out of the world for their life. They have no secret garden, they are not taken to a place which is separate from the world. Far from being removed, they live their new life ‘in’ the world, whilst they are not ‘of’ it.

So, even among the people of God, there is mixture. There are folks who masquerade as sheep –as God’s sons - but on the inside, as to their origin, they are really hostile, dangerous wolves. It is necessary to be able to pick the deception. Their danger to us is that they are false *prophets*. That is, they are coming speaking words that they claim to be God’s words for his people. How shall we know whether they are speaking as God’s children themselves?

Well, it won’t have to do with place – which garden we are in – it will have to do with being able to recognize the life of God when we see it manifesting in a person. When God is the source of a person’s life, and they are living in union with Him, then there is an outcome in their life which is recognizable; both as to works and to character.

Jesus’ metaphor changes to that of a tree; the test of a tree is manifest in its fruit. You will know a tree by its fruit. When applied to people that means that the fruit is bad fruit because it comes from a false prophet, and the fruit is good if it comes from a true prophet.

## 65-3 Statements people make as to their certainty that they know Him.

Jesus has been alerting his children about how disciples may discern if they are being tricked by false prophets [verses 15-20]. In the verses 21-23

Matthew records a shift to the sorts of things that people say to Jesus. In both examples given they are making assertions about their relation to Jesus which assert that they have knowledge of him; they are engaged with Jesus in a sure personal relation.

In both examples they initiate a conversation, they address Jesus. In both cases they are making an assertion by way of presumption, and they look to that statements to establish the truth of what they wish to imply as to their relation to him. In both cases it will be his response to this address that will make it clear whether it is so or not.

## 65-4 Familiarity with Jesus – the test of obedience to Father

There are those among God's flock who make a right confession. They are saying right-sounding things about Jesus and their relation to him. With their mouth they confess that Jesus is their Lord. They address Him as Lord, which seems to imply that they are his servants. How shall we know if they are speaking words only, or are true servants? The test is simple, are they actually obeying in deed?

And not obeying Jesus either! Jesus makes clear that they cannot relate to Him as their Lord and not be about the doing of the heavenly Father's business, carrying out His will. For that is what Jesus' himself does. They cannot be people focused on Jesus to the exclusion of the Father. This is a test of whether they have come to know the Father through the Son.

So there is something deeper running here. Jesus' advice to us is to discern if they are simply 'Jesus people' – who are attached to the Jesus as someone they acknowledge as Lord, but have no awareness of the shared life of the Trinity of the Godhead which is theirs, and no clear knowledge of the Father.

## 65-5 Works done in the name – the test of Jesus confessing them

Now, Jesus comes to a statement that people will address to Him on the day of His coming again. It is a day when He will presence Himself upon the earth to gather his flock and to judge the world. It will be a day when many people will see the issue of Jesus and find themselves overwhelmed with it. People will be desperate at that time.

There are many people, Jesus says, who will, on that day, plead the great and many works that they have done in his name as a basis that they have

relation with Him. They have used his name instrumentally, but they have no reciprocal knowledge of Him because He has none of them. Jesus makes clear that the final certainty is about whether God knows us, not whether we know Him, or can make some claim to know Him. Does He acknowledge us as His or does He deny any relation to Him? That is the matter upon which certainty lies in these matters.

## 65-6 How shall we build with certainty?- actively trust Jesus words.

Whoever hears these words that He is speaking, and does them, Jesus likens that person to a man who builds his house upon the rock. He is building his life upon sure and certain foundations that won't give way under stress.

Conversely, the man who hears and does not act upon them will find that his house collapses under the stress of rain, wind and flood – the foundations will be undermined.

With the use of this metaphor Jesus is picturing all those who listen to Him as builders. And the bedrock of the foundation for the builders is His word. And the way that foundation is laid is to act upon the words of Jesus. It calls for people to listen to the Rabbi as a true prophet of God, speaking gracious words from His Father as the Son of that Father.

The words He is speaking are ones to be obeyed. We are not dealing here with a philosophy, an ideal, or some advice from an armchair theologian. We are dealing with a Son, whose own obedience to His Father, born of His love for the Father [John 14.31], will cost Him his life.

Now you must not hear 'law' in this final statement of the Sermon on the Mount; as if Jesus is stating that you have to labour hard to build your house, and it is all up to you as to whether it will sustain in times of pressure and assault. It would then come down to "it all depends on you" if you are to survive. The true case is exactly the reverse; you must hear pure gospel.

*Since* such gracious words as the Saviour has been saying have been said; and *since* the kingdom of heaven belongs to you; and *since* you are salt and light in the world; and *since* there is a righteousness that surpasses the religious efforts of the scribes and Pharisees which is a gift; and *since* you are sons who are becoming more and more to the maturity of being like your heavenly Father; and *since* you have a righteousness that may be practiced in secret relation to your heavenly Father personally and really; and *since* you have such a treasure in heaven with Him and can live a life of no anxiety about earthly provisions of which He has foreseen; and *since* you are convinced that you ought not judge your neighbour because your own judgment is personally so compro-

mised that you ought leave that alone; and *since* you can take initiative with Father, asking, seeking and knocking anytime – in the light of such grace which has come to you and of such changes that God is beginning to work within you then you should act upon these wonderful words of the Rabbi, who is speaking prophetically in the name of His Father those things which He has always desired for you and has made provision to bring them to you in His Son.

## nt 66 – Matthew 7.28-29

### The authority of amazing grace

*Read carefully Luke 7.1;4.31-32.*

66-1 “...teaching...”

66-2 Scribes, in updating the law, came across as “demand”

66-3 Scribal teaching was based on the authority of men

66-4 “...amazed...”

66-5 “...having authority...”

#### 66-1 “ teaching”

When Jesus had brought this discourse to a close the crowd who heard him were overwhelmed. The reason why that is the case is explained in the verse 28. So we are to treat the two verses together, although within them both a sharp distinction is made. We may not separate them but we must not conflate them together either. What is involved here?

First, to learn why it is amazing we should miss that Matthew records that the people heard this as “teaching”. That is, it is taken by the crowd who heard it in the context of the way things were done at the time. The “teachers” were the rabbis and the scribes – they were laymen who explained to the people the way to obey God.

#### 66-2 Scribes, in updating of the law, came across as “demand”

All rabbis had their own take on the word of God as it was given in the Old Testament. As the voice of prophecy had ceased between the exile and the time of Jesus the word of God was no longer current, alive and applied. You can

obey a prophet, but what if there are none speaking right now?

The rabbis took the law - the torah - and they began to take it apart, piece by piece, looking in to what it meant, there an then, when it was spoken. They then interpreted it, and explained it to the people; and then they applied it, here and now. So they were not backward about saying to people what God required.

Further, these demands were often fastidious and lacked a larger grasp of the ethic of God's own character and life. In that they were highly detailed they were not always able to be practiced anyway by the working man who was engaged in earning a living.

### 66-3 Scribal teaching was based on the authority of men

Each rabbi, having studied the words of the former rabbis, had his own judgments as to what the law demanded. It was this standard – his 'yoke' – that he applied to those around him and particularly his disciples who followed after him. He would choose these disciples to learn from him and to later pass on his yoke in their maturity.

It was customary to quote their respective authority for the interpretation that they would give, and so the authority of the scribes was really the authority of the precedents that had been established before them. The scribes took great effort to be learned in these. The justification for their interpretation was often preceded by such expressions as "...Rabbi Hillel says..."; "... Rabbi Shammai says...", to mention two well known men of the time.

### 66-4 "...amazed..."

In the light of what we have laid down in *nt* 65-6, it will be clear that with Jesus, seen against the background of this rabbinical style, and the way the scribes were established a strong law-based application which put large demands upon people, his message was amazing. It is amazing because of is a total message of grace – of the gift of God coming to them for their salvation and entry into life and the personal knowledge of God. In that sense it is a deep contrast to what the scribes were teaching.

### 64-5 "...having authority..."

But it was amazing for another reason, and that is the one that verse 29 makes clear. It had to do, not so much as to the content – which was amazing

enough – but with the person who delivered it. He taught them as one having authority and not as one of the scribes.

In complete contrast with the scribes, as men who drew their teaching from the traditions of the men who had gone before them, the people recognised that when Jesus taught they were registering that He was attended by God - they heard Him prophetically. In comparison to the scribes He was not like them.

Positively, as they listened to his voice they also heard the word of God at the same time. When people hear God as a person speaks they cannot but receive the person who speaks as well. Here was an event like as had not been around for a long time – a man spoke from God direct. In this sense Jesus carried the authority of God in what He spoke. And that is what made the teaching amazing as well – for what God was saying was good news indeed!