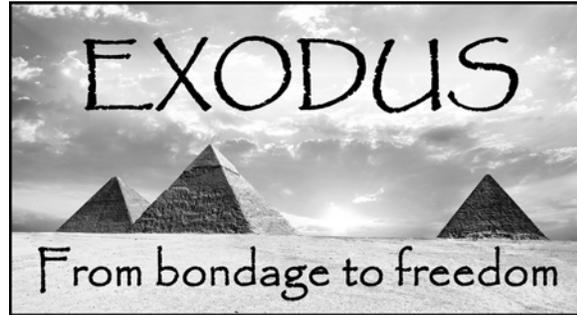


STUDY GUIDE

Week 8: Matthew 5:1-12

The Future is Now

November 6, 2016



Before you begin this study, ask the Holy Spirit to show you what God is saying in these scriptures.

Introduction

For the last several weeks we have studied the journey of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt through their challenging times in the wilderness to the brink of the promised land, using all of this as a metaphor for our own journey from the slavery of sin through the wilderness of disobedience and trial. Having made this journey, we can now examine the promised land itself. We must learn to live a new life as God's free people. Jesus fills us with His Spirit and empowers us to live in this new freedom. Just as the Israelites received God's Ten Commandments as part of God's covenantal promises, so too we can experience the blessed life we have through following Jesus' teachings, including the Beatitudes which we study this week. DeGroat provides this reassurance (p. 221), "God never gives up on us. He continues to remake our lives, casing the big vision for our maturity that we find in the Beatitudes." As you gather in your study group, join the crowd who gathered around Jesus. Listen to what He has to offer to you, wherever you are on your faith journey.

Day 1: Read Matthew 5: 1-4

1. Jesus had just called the disciples to follow Him and was beginning to draw crowds to hear His teaching. Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down to teach, as was the custom of Jewish rabbis in that day. (Remember also that Moses went up the mountain to receive God's law.) This scripture passage has been called the Beatitudes. Each one begins with the word *blessed*. What does the word *blessed* mean to you? (Use a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia.) What does it mean to you when someone tells you to "Have a blessed day" or "God bless you"?
2. In verse 3, Jesus talks about the "poor in spirit." What does this mean? Was He referring to poor people? How does James 4: 7-10 help you to understand this phrase? What gets in the way of our being poor in spirit?
3. What is the "kingdom of heaven" that Jesus is promising? (See Isaiah 61: 1-3; Matthew 5: 10 and 19; Matthew 24: 34; and Luke 4.) To whom does Jesus promise this? Why does Jesus use the present tense instead of the future tense when talking about the kingdom of heaven?
4. Verse 4 says that mourners are also blessed. Do you think that every mourner is blessed? By whom are the mourners to be comforted? (See Isaiah 25: 8; Isaiah 61: 1-3; Luke 4: 16-21; and Revelation 7: 17.) As you have mourned in your life, perhaps because of a significant loss, who or what provided comfort? How has your grief increased your sensitivity or empathy?

Day 2: Read Matthew 5: 5-6

1. In verse 5, what does it mean to be meek? (See Psalm 37: 5-11 and Matthew 11: 27-30.) How is meekness different from shyness or weakness? How does meekness compare with humility? What gets in the way of our being meek?
2. In Numbers 12: 3, Moses is described as meek. In what ways was this true of him? What leaders in our society or our world (including religious leaders) exhibit meekness? Which ones don't?
3. According to verse 5, what will the meek inherit? What do you think this means, and why would the meek receive this blessing?
4. In verse 6, what does Jesus mean by hungering and thirsting for righteousness? (See Isaiah 11: 4-5; Isaiah 55: 1-2; John 4: 14, 6: 48; Romans 1: 17 and 3: 21-22; and Philippians 3: 7-11.) What is righteousness? (See a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia.) Is there something we can do to develop a greater hunger for righteousness, or does it result from a set of circumstances in our life beyond our control? What gets in the way of our hungering and thirsting for righteousness?

Day 3: Read Matthew 5: 7-8

1. What does it mean to be merciful, as verse 7 describes? (See Psalm 41: 1; Matthew 9: 13; 12: 7; 18: 32-35; Ephesians 4: 32; and James 2: 13.) What gets in the way of our showing mercy? How is there a blessing in showing mercy to others, particularly to someone who has deeply hurt us or betrayed us? How is this possible?
2. Can you think of significant or dramatic examples of mercy extended to others, in our current society or in recent history? What lessons can we learn from this?
3. In verse 8, what does it mean to be pure in heart? (See Psalm 24: 3-4; 2 Corinthians 7: 1; 2 Peter 3: 13-15, and 1 John 3: 1-3.) Where does a pure heart come from? (See Psalm 51: 10 and Acts 15: 8-9.) How does this help us to understand that the pure in heart will see God?
4. What circumstances in life can affect the purity of our hearts, either positively or negatively? Is a "heart of faith" that is rooted in Christ different from a secular good and charitable heart? What is the difference?

Day 4: Read Matthew 5: 9-10

1. In verse 9, what is a peacemaker? (See Romans 14: 19; Romans 12: 9-21; James 3: 16-18; and Hebrews 12: 10-11.) Who are the peacemakers in Jesus' day? Who are the peacemakers in history or in our world today?
2. Where do you find the source of peace? (See John 14: 27) Describe a situation where someone was a peacemaker for you. How have you been a peacemaker? What did you learn from these experiences? What gets in the way of our being peacemakers?
3. Why are peacemakers called children of God? (See John 1: 12-13; Romans 8: 14; and 1 John 3: 1.)
4. In versed 10, what does it mean to be persecuted because of righteousness? Are you aware of people who have been persecuted because of righteousness? Why are they persecuted? (See also 1 Peter 3: 13-14; 2 Timothy 3: 12.) What encouragement or blessing do they have?

Day 5: Read Matthew 11-12

1. Verse 11 changes the terminology from "blessed are they" to "blessed are you." What do you think is the significance of this shift?
2. Verse 11 continues the theme of being persecuted. What other words are used in verse 11 to describe what people do to you? Have you experienced a situation where you were insulted, persecuted, or falsely accused? Have you had a situation where you were persecuted because of your faith in Jesus, because people knew you were a Christian? What did you learn from these experiences?
3. Why did Jesus say in verse 12 to "rejoice and be glad" in the midst of persecution for following Him? Why is this difficult? What motivation do you have for persevering through times of persecution?

Day 6

(If you have the book Leaving Egypt, read chapters 15 and 16. If you do not have the book, consider how you might respond to these questions based on your own experiences and understanding.)

1. In Chapter 15, DeGroat explores the definitions of a Happy and Virtuous life and the meaning of living faithfully in freedom. On page 205, DeGroat says "Try as you might, you cannot get away from rules, responsibilities and requirements" He cites examples of seeking freedom from a restrictive lifestyle. How are we like the Israelites, who grumbled on the path of the Exodus journey, but were rescued them from enslavement and were looking forward to the Promised Land? What are the blessings and benefits of being freed *from* the slavery of negative lifestyle choices *to* a Christ-centered mission-oriented life, with His set of guidelines?
2. On page 220, DeGroat says, "We enter into the wilderness restoration program exemplified in the beatitudes, not for some personal enrichment program, but for the sake of the world." Why does the Beatitude lifestyle lead us to community mission and discipleship?
3. Chapter 16, (p. 222) gives us additional insight into DeGroat's observations of the direction of the human heart going one of two paths. One path is returning "back toward Egypt, that place of emotional and spiritual enslavement, difficulty and division" (citing examples of neurosis lifestyle behaviors) or the other path that is "directed toward Home – toward a life with God" (exhibiting a theosis lifestyle and behaviors). How crucial is it to know the condition of our hearts? God loves us and seeks us where we are. Which of the two directions are you heading on your path of life? Have you accepted the love and unconditional grace of God, made possible through the sacrifice of His son Jesus, who died on the Cross to welcome you into a brotherhood with him?
4. We have survived the 'Journey' and arrived 'Home'. A life in Christ, a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), where we can feel comfortable and be ourselves and always remember we are God's precious children; He will never leave us. On page 235, DeGroat reminds us "God keeps accompanying us along the way: back then in a cloud, in a prophet, in manna, in a tent: and now in Jesus and, even more intimately in the Spirit. As we wander, God just draws closer, not farther away." Do you have a blessed assurance and confidence of your place in the eternal Kingdom of God?
5. DeGroat writes (p. 221) that "...we are participants in Israel's story, fellow wanderers through wilderness lands, breaking through to the promised land, but often plagued by old memories of Egypt. God never gives up on us. He continues to remake our lives, casting the big vision for our maturity that we find in the Beatitudes. The happy life, as we've seen, requires wilderness travel, but it launches us into new possibilities of growth, of service, of virtue, of freedom." Pray and ask God for discernment in how you will live out each one of the Beatitudes to bring praise, honor and glory to Him!