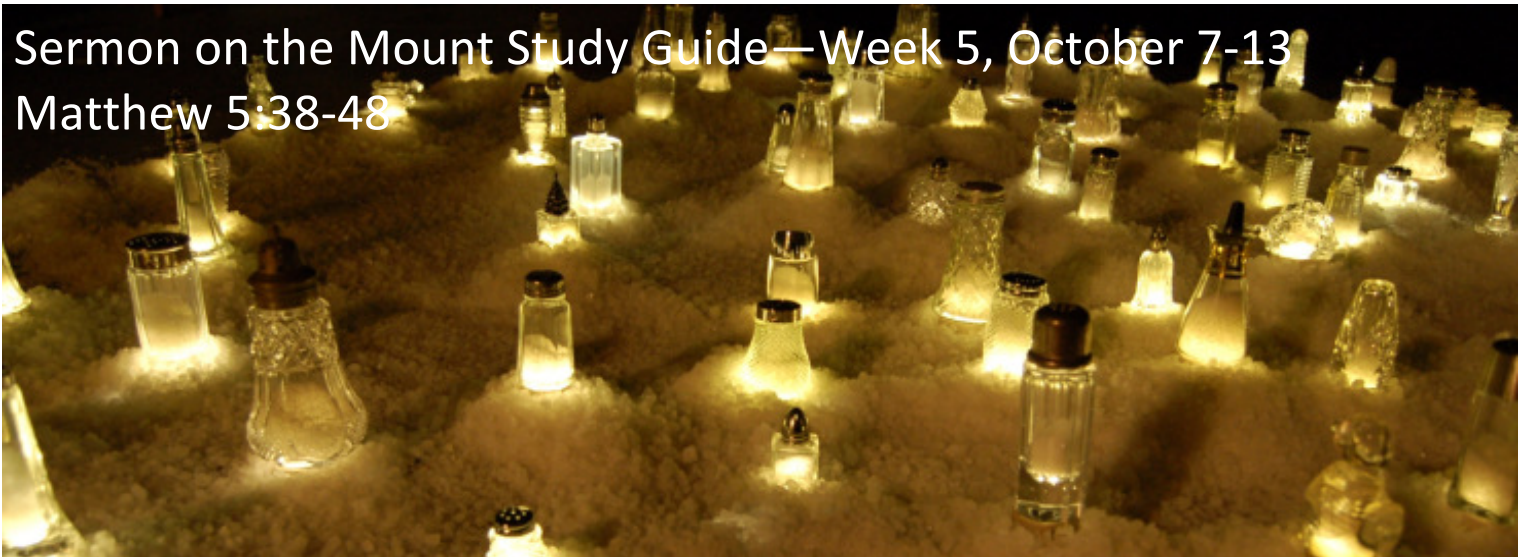


Sermon on the Mount Study Guide—Week 5, October 7-13

Matthew 5:38-48



- I. “Now, when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.” (Matthew 5:1-2)
- II. Opening prayer for Illumination
- III. Read Matthew 5:38-48
- IV. Stott Study Guide: pp. 28-30
- V. *The Divine Conspiracy*, pp. 175-182 (Matt. 5:38-48), 182-185 (summary of the past two weeks of study):

Building on his interpretation of Matthew 5:21-37, which we looked at last week, Dallas Willard continues to emphasize the theme of *dikaiosune* (“true inner goodness”) in his interpretation of Jesus’ famous “turn-the-other-cheek” and “love-your-enemies” teachings in Matthew 5:38-48.

Again, Willard states that these teachings are not rigid instructions for how Christians are *always* to act in *all* such situations *everywhere*. These teachings are not just mindless guidelines that must be followed no matter what variables are involved. Instead, writes Willard, “All is changed when we realize that these are illustrations of what a certain kind of person, the kingdom person, will characteristically do in such situations” (178).

Willard continues, pointing out that “we are looking at how people live who stand in the flow of God’s life now. We see the interior rightness of those who are living—as a matter of course, not just in exceptional moments—beyond the rightness of the scribe and Pharisee” (178).

Thus, these two passages in the Sermon on the Mount seem less to be a new kind of commandment for Christian believers to follow without deviation and more to be examples of the kind of life ordinary human beings live when transformed by the grace of God, the kind of life people are able to live once they understand that God’s Kingdom is already partly here and now.

In light of that realization, people begin to live into the God-given *dikaiosune* Jesus is focused on cultivating in his followers. These are people who have found “true inner goodness” as they try to be as Jesus was, proclaiming the reality and immediacy of the Kingdom of God through how they treat others—even those enemies who treat them poorly.

For a summary of the this week and last week’s studies and a broader interpretation of the texts we’ve looked at, please read the sections following “Goodness in Love” on pp. 182-185 of *The Divine Conspiracy*.

VI. Questions of 1st Importance:

1. Questions for the Text

- i. In Matthew 5:38 Jesus directly quotes three passages from the Torah (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; and Deuteronomy 19:21). How does Jesus reinterpret these passages? How does this fit with what Jesus says earlier in Matthew 5:17-20? How might those Old Testament passages have been misapplied in Jesus' time and culture? What about those commands might Jesus be really focusing on?
- ii. How does the sequential order of the rest of chapter 5 inform and nuance verses 38-48? How do Jesus' earlier teaching on anger and contempt help us understand what he says about "eye-for-eye" revenge and loving our enemies?
- iii. Do we love those we don't like? Or do we only treat well those we value? What does Jesus have to say about this in verse 46-47?
- iv. What does Jesus mean when he says in verse 48, "Be perfect, therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect"? Willard writes, "[Jesus] does not call us to do what he did, but to be as he was, permeated with love. Then the doing of what he did and said becomes the natural expression of who are in him" (*DC*, 183). How does this perspective help us understand the concept of Godly perfection?

2. Questions for the World

- i. Why does Jesus say to "pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven"? How does prayer change how we feel towards someone? What experiences do we have with praying for those we don't like?
- ii. Christians sometimes talk about trying to live as Jesus did. Willard, however, maintains that we will never be able to do that. He points out that Jesus was the only person who could ever live his life, and he already did that. Willard instead argues the opposite—that we must live our lives as if Jesus were in our shoes, living our lives for us. Willard believes that we must not try to do what Jesus did, but rather be how he was when it came to living a life of love. How does this strike us? How does it affect our notion of "following Jesus' example"?

VII. Questions of 2nd Importance:

1. Questions for the Text

- i. In Jesus' time, a Roman soldier could force civilians to help him carry his load for up to a mile. How does this inform our reading of what Jesus is saying in verses 38-42?
- ii. How does verse 45, idea that God causes the sun to rise over both evil and good people and sends rain on both the righteous and unrighteous, affect our understanding of God's providence and care in the world?

2. Questions for the World

- i. What does turning the other cheek look like today? When someone is unjustly unkind to us? When someone cuts us in line? When someone spreads rumors about us?
- ii. Who might view you as an enemy? Would you want them praying for you?

VIII. If so desired, watch Monday's chapel on this week's text at:

IX. Suggested Spiritual Discipline for this week: Prayer