

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Taught by Bruce Bickel

Session: August 24, 2012

Father, as we ponder the words of that marvelous hymn, *It Is Well With My Soul*, we just recognize that apart from you, we are lost, apart from you we are in the bondage of sin. Thank you for your grace, for your redemptive work in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. What the Father ordained, the Son accomplished and the Holy Spirit applies. To that end, Father, even though we don't understand all the things that are going on in this world during our time of life, we do know one thing for certain, that we have the assurance that things are well with our soul. To that end, we just praise you and thank you for Jesus' sake, and may it be so. Amen.

Before we get into our study today on the Sermon on the Mount, I want to express my deep gratitude to all of you for the ministry we've had in our brother Tin's life in Vietnam. You were most gracious. The Lord was pleased to have us raise enough money to send to him. We wired him the \$5,000 about ten days ago. He is now able to get his new leg. I have a couple of emails from him that he wanted me to read to you, and I do this with great appreciation and respect and honor for you as my brothers in Christ. This is from Tin:

"Dear Bruce, my brother in Jesus Christ. Thanks to God I have received your wire. Five thousand is really for me an enormous fortune. It's great. An amazing grace that saved me and all my family out of the decrease. Praise the Lord for his compassion, his love endures forever. Me and my wife will go to Saigon Monday evening to get my leg. Pray for us. Tin, your brother in Christ."

That's one letter, and then here's another one:

"Dear Brother Bruce, and dear Friday Men's Group. Praise the Lord, glorious and majestic are his deeds and his righteousness endures forever. We will send you all the information and pictures from Saigon when I get my new leg. Blessings to all of the brothers. Tin and (his wife)."

Brothers, thank you very much. Once again, we've just demonstrated the power of the body of Christ worldwide. Thank you very much that we're in partner in this ministry together, I'm deeply appreciative of all your kindness and your generosity and compassion. I think the best is yet to come. We'll certainly keep you posted. Tom, I appreciate your help with all of this. Thank you, brothers—very, very deeply appreciative of your partnership in this.

Let's open your Bibles please to Matthew 5, looking at the Beatitudes. We just finished that. Tom did a wonderful job last week introducing us into the next portion of this Scripture, which has to do with legalism. Legalism is essentially saying the cross is not enough. You're basically saying that, while the cross accomplished something, there are some things that I can add onto it that will impress God or make me and my standing better before him.

We need to understand that when you're justified by faith alone because of the grace of God because of the finished work of Christ on the cross, you are no more justified today than you were at the moment of your first belief. In other words, your standing in Christ cannot be improved by anything that you and I do. It was accomplished by what Christ accomplished. What the Father ordained, the Son accomplished and the Holy Spirit applied.

Let me just read some portions of Matthew 5 that will take us into the next portion. We've talked about the witness of the citizens of the kingdom, that we are salt and light. Salt slows down corruption. Light exposes sin. That's the consequence of our having the blessed attitudes of the Beatitudes, where Jesus, at

his first staff meeting says, “Follow me. This is what I will make you into. You will become this.”

The real issue is not that we do for Christ. It is what is Christ making us into. You know that tell statement in the Gospel that say, “I’ll make you fishers of men”? We emphasize the fishers of men, but we don’t emphasize the “make you” enough. You see, who really is it that makes us? It’s Christ makes us. We take this feeling that says I’m fisher of men and so we run off doing all sorts of things. There’s nothing right with that. All I’m saying is we need to back up and look at the verb. “I will *make you* fishers of men.” You see, God is doing something in our life, where he is actually molding and refining and changing our character and making us into something. We really need to take a glimpse and understanding that something’s going on in your life when you come to saving faith.

Legalism basically says, “I can make myself something that Christ did not finish, and by the things that I do, I’m going to change my status before him.” When you’re justified by faith alone, the cross is enough. That doesn’t mean that we don’t work our tails off for the kingdom of God and for the glory of God. I’m not suggesting that. All I’m talking about is your positional status before our Heavenly Father is not changed by anything that you and I do, because you are being made into something at the moment of your conversion, your regeneration, your justification by faith alone, and your status can never improve any more than it could the first time you believed. That’s what justification means. You get credit for his sinless perfection and his perfect obedience.

What Tom taught us last week was the understanding of the tendency that we think that I can just add something to it. There’s no merit in what we do. What we do with our good works are expressions of a love response in obedience. We’re expressing to God that we love him. You do that through our acts of service and our becoming fishers of men. I trust, guys, that you’ll just ponder sometime that little verb that says this, “I will *make you*.” What is it God is making us into? That’s really what we need to consider. God is making us into something.

Let’s consider now Matthew 5:17-48, about Jesus’ relationship to the law, which has to do with our legalism. ¹⁷Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

²¹You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ ²²But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.”

²⁷You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ ²⁸But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.”

“³¹It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ ³²But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

“³³Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ ³⁴But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.”

“³⁸You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴²Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.”

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

I want to read the next verse in chapter 6; we’ll get to it later, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.” You notice, brothers, that it ends in verse 48, “Be perfect.” In chapter 6, it says, “Be careful.” There’s your understanding of legalism. Be perfect. That’s the expectation of the kingdom citizen. But at the same time, the next thing that comes out of his mouth is this, “Be careful.” You see, the human tendency for us to think is this, “I’m going to add to the cross. I’m going to add something to my merit, that I’m going to impress God with my standing, and I’m going to improve my standing before him because the cross is not enough.” The first thing that Jesus says, after he gives us the law, and so this is how you walk as a believer, he says, “Be careful.”

As we get into chapter 6, we’re going to see the motives. You’ve got to ask yourself this question. Why do I do what I do? You see, a couple of weeks ago, I asked you this question, about the Beatitudes, “What do you think about when you’re not thinking about anything?” Where does your mind go when it’s mindless? When you’re not thinking about anything, where do you go?

I woke up in the middle of last night just besieged with sexual thoughts. I really just had to say, “Lord, stop that! I’m going to teach this tomorrow. I’ve got to teach this tomorrow. You’ve got to remove those thoughts from my mind.” It was just like I was under Satanic attack in my mind, and I had to say, “Lord, take my mind elsewhere. You’ve got to remove those thoughts, because if you don’t, it’ll be a disaster.” You see, that’s the battleground we’re in.

At the same time, the expectation that he has for us is, “be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. But be careful you do not practice your righteousness before men, because if you do, you’re going to get exactly what you want.” You get praise from the world, but no praise from the Heavenly Father.

As we go through the rest of Matthew 5, I want you to see how it ends, but I also want you to see the warning in Matthew 6, so that we don’t take Matthew 5 and think that I’m going to impress God by my

obedience. Our obedience doesn't impress God the all because he's the source of our obedience. He's the reason for our obedience. We can't even take credit for our own obedience. We can't even take credit for our sanctification because that's the work that he does in us, because he's going to make us fishers of men. You see, he is in the business of making us something. So we have to be careful.

Let me give you a quick overview of verses 17-48, and then probably next week and the week after, Sig we'll probably be using this outline for the next couple of weeks. Let's just take a quick look at big picture of verses 17-48 of Matthew 5.

In 17-20, Jesus demonstrated a realization far greater than anything that had ever been expected before, that was the perfect external conduct of the Pharisees. In other words, he was saying this, "Don't be like the Pharisees. They were the ones who thought that, "We can take our own conduct and add to our status before God; we will achieve greater merit and our position will be improved because of our obedience." That's legalism, so he says don't do that.

We begin to see how he begins deal with this in verses 17-20. I would invite you to go to Philippians 3. To show you an example, Paul does the same thing with himself in chapter 3 of Philippians, beginning at verse 4, "4though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. 7But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ."

Now he's saying this, "If anybody had confidence in his abilities to live a life that was going to achieve merit before God and please him, I'm the guy. Just look at my credentials. Here's my resume. I've done everything exactly according to the law. I was circumcised at the right time. I'm a Hebrew of Hebrews. I'm of the right tribe; I was born on the right side of the track. I have the right education. I went to the right college. I studied under the right mentors. If you want to look at me externally, I'm the guy to look at to say, 'He could have more confidence than anybody else in his ability to please God because of his external conduct.'" He said, "A Pharisee of Pharisees; I'm impeccable." Notice the word he says, "I was blameless," externally. "Externally I'm blameless." Then he goes on to say, "But I count all that as loss for the sake of Christ."

That's what we have to understand as we move into Matthew 5 and see these instructions on the law. We need to realize that Jesus is taking us to a standard that is far superior than anything anybody had ever heard before because he was removing it from the external and placing it in the internal. He said, "The issue now is not your merit externally in your conduct; it's the motive of your heart."

Why do you do the things you do? Brothers, if there's anything that we need to examine ourselves, in this day and age, as we come here every Friday, as we walk out the door, is ask ourselves the question, "Why am I going to do what I'm going to do today? Do I really think I'm going to improve my standing before God? Do I really think I can do that?" You see, that's the height of audacity to think...you're basically saying this, "The cross isn't enough, because I need to add to it. I need to add to something that Jesus didn't finish." That's an affront to the doctrine of the justification by faith alone when we have that attitude.

Jesus is saying in these verses there's a whole different mindset that you have to live about life. Notice this comes right after the Beatitudes, when he says, "This is how you enter the kingdom, and this is how you're going to be a witness to the kingdom, because you're going to naturally, supernaturally, just as a result of your conversion and regeneration, you're going to slow down corruption. That's who you are. That's who I'm making you into. Not only that, just who you are, who I'm making you into, it's going to

expose sin. This the consequence of who I'm making you into." Now you don't control that. You don't go make it happen; that's who you are. That's who you are. That's the consequence of your being.

Remember the word "blessed" in the Beatitudes? It's the Greek word makarios. Literally it means happy in spite of circumstances. The deeper meaning is this prosperity of mind. It literally means this—the state of being that's aware of happiness. In other words, you're happy because of your being, not because of your doing. You're happy because of your being, not because of your circumstances. You're happy because of your being. That's what he's saying. It is that person that is blessed, who's a kingdom citizen. That means that our whole motive for everything we do is radically altered and changed. Yes, the law is there as our standard, and I came to fulfill the law; I didn't come to destroy it. He destroyed the law by fulfilling it, didn't he? Who were the ones who really destroyed the law? The Pharisees, because they removed the life from it. They basically preserved it by embalming it, externally, and therefore, they took the life out of the law.

You see, the law was to bring into them life, and they removed the life of the law by making it external. That's the significance of John 3 and the conversation with Nicodemus, "Nicodemus, you've got a lot of theology right, externally. You're a Pharisee. Your life is impeccable. You're just like Paul You're blameless. But Nicodemus, you've made one fatal error. You've externalized religion. You've made it something you do rather than something that you are."

So now in the law, he talks about his relationship with the law, and says, "The law now must be deeply ingrained into your heart." You see, that's what we saw in Ezekiel 36, "I will put my law in them." Where is the law of God now? It's in you. It's not out there. It's not in a book. It's not on pages. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, the law has been placed in you, and the reason is so that you will be obedient to it. You now have the resources to do that, and you can't even take credit for your own obedience. It's something that God does for you because he's making us into something. You understand that?

I'm just overwhelmed by this thought that God is making me into something. Look back on your life. What's he making you into? One of the things he's making us into is fishers of men. That means we're the proclaimers of the Gospel. We're participants with him in sharing the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ, and people come to saving faith because you're salt and light. But the thing you've got to ask yourself, even in the wonderful activity of being a kingdom participator, is what's your motive? Why are you doing what you're doing? Is it to raise money? Necessary. Why are you doing it? Is it to get accolades from men? Why do we initiate things? Why do we initiate things? You see, what's the real reason we do the stuff we do?

Let me take you to a couple of verses to help us understand this. Let's go to John 5:18-19. Let's back up to verse 18 so we'll understand the context. ¹⁸"This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. ¹⁹So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord,'" other translations say, "I do nothing on my own initiative," "but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise."

Now go down to verse 30, "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me."

Go to John 8:28-29, ²⁸So Jesus said to them, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. ²⁹And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.'"

And then one more in this sequence, of understanding Jesus' mindset and motive. Go to John 17:4-5, "4I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. 5And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed."

Now what's his mindset? That he's making us into, brothers? It's this. My job is not to go out and initiate ministry. My job is to discern what the Father's doing around me, because I know this. My intent is to really want to please him. The best way I can please him is to figure out what he's doing. If he's doing something and I join that, guess what's going to happen? He will be pleased. You want to please God? Ask yourself the question, "Lord, what are you doing around me today? Because I want join that. Because my heart's desire really is, in my human frailty, I really want to please you, and I can't do that by initiating things on my own. The only way I can really please you and be convinced of it is I've got to find out what you're doing around me. Give me the discernment, the ability to discern what you're doing around me, and then I'm going to join that today so that at the end of the day, I can say this. I've finished what you gave me to do."

Bob: *What's the best way, what advice would you have for us, to discern that? We've been through this before, but want to hear your comment again.*

Discern what's God doing around us?

Bob: *Yes.*

Well first of all, I would say Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of God dwell in you richly." You start with that. In other words, we've got to...a friend of mine called me the other night. I met with him in St. Louis the other day and spent time when I was on a business trip. He said, "Bruce, you got me thinking about something. You know, Paul wrote letters that were like diaries. And so he wrote all these letters to the churches, and they were his personal diaries to these churches. As I look at the Scripture, you've helped me understand that the Scripture really is God's diary to mankind, and we just get to read it. Because it deals with three things—creation, the fall and redemption." This is God's diary to mankind about three issues: creation, the fall and redemption.

Now Bob, I would say, the first start of discerning what God wants us to do, for us to discern what he's doing around us, is to let the Word of God dwell in us richly. However you decide to do that, in your quiet time, you read large portions of Scripture. I think one thing that we don't do enough of is we don't read large portions of Scripture. We take a verse and just read it and try to apply it. Which is fine. But I think, I'm finding that I need to read large portions of Scripture. That's why I wanted to read you Matthew 5:17-48. To let you see the big picture. God is saying, "This is my diary to mankind. You now have the privilege of coming inside of me and seeing my mindset and my thought patterns on three critical issues that nobody else can resolve except me. That's creation. What's the purpose of creation? What happened at the fall? And what does redemption do for you? Because I'm making you into something."

I would say the best way is to start with the foundation of letting the Word of God dwell in us richly. And then I think it's doing the other stuff. Put yourself in the position of receiving grace. Coming to the Friday men's study, being held accountable with your brothers. Worshiping on the Lord's Day. Taking the sacraments of the Lord's Supper and Baptism. Participating in those areas where God showers his grace upon us, just in the fellowship that we have with one another. As you're in tune with all of that, then you begin just to say, "Lord, I know your Holy Spirit's purpose is to guide us into all truth. Would you guide me into all truth today and give me the discerning spirit to discern what you're doing around me today. I have no idea what that's going to be. So I relinquish the authority of my own initiation and I give it to you, because I'm not going to initiate anything. I'm not going to sit on my butt and do nothing.

I'm going to be an aggressive responder when I see and sense what you're doing around me. And Lord, when I see that, I'm going to join in on that because I really want to please you. The only way that I know that I can be convinced that I'm pleasing you is this. I've got to be involved in what you're doing, not ask you to get involved in what I'm doing." See there's a difference? Huge difference. That's the mindset of Christ.

As we look into this study of the law, the external law that the Pharisees lived their lives by and they were blameless, but Jesus said you made a fatal flaw. It's not internalized. You see, in the new covenant, the law has been placed in us, in Jeremiah 11. Ezekiel 36, "I put my spirit in them. I put my law in them. So that you will obey."

In reality, brothers, you and I can't even take credit for our own obedience. You can't do that. You see, you're being made into something that's radically different than the world's ever seen. Jesus begins to introduce that here by saying, "Not all these external, guys. There's something deeper and a whole different standard, and that standard is this. Be perfect, but be careful."

Sig: *How do I keep missing that?*

Missing what, please?

Sig: *The internalization of it. I mean, I hear you say that [UNCLEAR]...I'm more like a Pharisee, but yet my mind wants me to think I'm more like an apostle or a disciple, but I hear that all the time. How do I...is it just my sin or the nature that I can't really get that? I need to hear it all the time, be reminded, that I have to internalize that and not think of law as [UNCLEAR]. What you're saying is [UNCLEAR], but it's like who don't I get it?*

Well I don't have an answer for you because I'm not you. But I bet you...I appreciate the honesty you have. I bet you that everybody else is asking the same question. At least we ought to be asking that question. Paul says that in Romans 6, "Why do I do the things that I don't want to do. I see this law of sin working in my members. I really don't want to do that, but I do that." You see, when you recognize that question, Sig, the one thing it does is it draws you to Christ again, because you absolutely recognize your helplessness to do what you want to do. That's when you go to the Lord and just trust him. That's what it means to walk by faith. That's called maturity. It's called maturation. And that's a process. It doesn't happen overnight, and you'll probably need to hear this a hundred thousand more times before the Lord calls you to glory. But each one of those, you're just a little bit closer than before. That's called maturity.

Remember spirituality is an absolute defined by the person and work of Christ. We don't become more spiritual. We become more mature. Spirituality is more of Christ and less of me. That's a process. That'll happen just moment by moment. Part of that is coming to our Friday men's group. That's why we've been meeting for 17 years. Finally, after 17 years, we're seeing some progress. {LAUGHTER} Really! It's taken us this long, and the Lord willing, we'll meet another 17 years. Hopefully we'll say, "You know, back in 2012, we were fledglings. Now we're a fledgling plus one. Not much more, but just a little bit better." You see, that's maturity. That's what we're being made into.

We just have to rest in the fact that God is sovereign, and God knows what he's doing. There comes a point, brothers, when you have to say this, "I relinquish all my initiation and I give it to you. I'm going to have to do that again tomorrow, and maybe even this afternoon, because I know myself well enough to know that when I go back in the office, I'm going to want to initiate something."

Now, again, I'm not saying you sit on your butt and do nothing. That's not what I'm saying. Do you

understand that? All I'm saying is you recognize that you're now more discerning about what he's doing around you than you are trying to figure out what you should do.

It's like that little bracelet we wore that was fashionable years ago. WWJD—What would Jesus do? Well I have no idea what Jesus would do. According to Isaiah 55, "My ways are not your ways." It's rather ludicrous to think that I'm going to know what he would do when he's already said, "My ways aren't like yours, and my thoughts are not like yours," and you have the audacity to say, "Oh, I'm going to do it because Jesus would do it." That's an affront to him, I believe. I never wore that because I thought it shouldn't say WWJD; it should say WHJD—what has Jesus done. I know what he's done. He's redeemed me. He's redeemed me from the pit, because the cross was enough. That's what's going to change my conduct, not the fact that I can do it because Jesus would do it. I have no idea what he would do, but I sure know what he has done. He redeemed me by the blood of the cross. I'm wrapped in the robes of righteousness. I've been justified by faith alone. My position before God can never change, least of all by anything that I do in addition to it, because the cross is enough. The cross is enough. We begin to live in the reality of that. That takes time, Sig. That's what we call maturity.

***Audience Member:** You say about we should be seeking where he's already been working [UNCLEAR] so I'm struggling with this. Hudson Taylor chose to become a missionary to China. How is God working in China for him to say I'm going to go join that when there's really [UNCLEAR] of any sense of faith [UNCLEAR]... I'm struggling with the, he just felt called by God and had a burden to the people of China to go over and be a missionary to them [UNCLEAR] I look at it, I guess humanly, is he too initiative [UNCLEAR]...*

No, he didn't take initiative; he took response. He was an aggressive responder. The confusion is this. We think of initiation externally—something I'm going to do externally. God works us internally. God was doing something, not outside of Hudson Taylor. Where was he doing something? Inside of Hudson Taylor. What did Hudson Taylor do? Responded. Who initiated? God did. You see, that's the difference.

Our mindset of initiation thinks externally. It's just like the law. We think we do these things externally. Jesus says, "No, it's internal." So don't worry about what's going on externally around you. You want to ask yourself, "Lord, what are you doing inside of me? Who are you making me into? That's what I want to discern, as I look at that, that I'm going to be an aggressive responder, and that will manifest itself by going to China," in Hudson Taylor's life. Hudson Taylor didn't initiate China; he responded to what God was working in him, and he was an aggressive responder and moved to China.

***Ted:** God gave Hudson Taylor the desire to do that.*

Amen.

***Ted:** Hudson Taylor, in the end, could not resist that desire. That desire was overpowering. I don't know why we find that [UNCLEAR] because it happens in our lives all the time. When I had a desire to marry Diana and nothing could stop me from it. That was my driving desire. Do you concur with that, Bruce?*

What God does, when he works in us, he gives us desires that we've never had before. That's how... we need to discern that. That's why I'm trying to make the distinction between external initiation and internal desire. God works in us to create these desires in us, that all of a sudden, they become compelling and we become an aggressive responder. We need to be discerning enough to say, "Lord, this is what you're doing in me. This is who you're making me into. I now need to respond to that." Beforehand we didn't have these desires. Now you've got desires you've never had before. Be perfect, but be careful.

Brian: *I think we're trying to do an either/or instead as opposed to both/and. If you look at 2 Corinthians 1:17, it talks about Paul planning. He said, "When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, 'Yes, yes' and 'No, no'?" So in one way, we're to plan things out, but on the other side, look at James 4:13-17, it talks about going to the city [UNCLEAR] do this or that, but what we really should be saying, if it's the Lord's will. Going after working it, working it, working it, but then, in an instant, [UNCLEAR] every single incident, it can't be a day by day, it has to be an instant by instant, second by second, "Lord, am I doing what you would have me doing? Am I bringing you glory? Whenever I'm interrupted, is this interruption from you?" and then aggressively respond to that interruption, so I get to share the Gospel with the person in the bathroom stall that talked to me for some unknown reason.*

Sure. The issue is discerning the whole spirit of what we see in Matthew 5 is what's going on internally in us. That's where the activity is going. It's not externally outside of us, it's inside of us. Call that word desire, call that word God initiating it, whatever you want to call it; but he is doing something in us. What we need to discern is get over this idea of doing externally, and first of all, asking ourselves, "Lord, what are you doing in me? Who are you making me into, that I now become an aggressive responder because when I respond to what you're doing inside of me through your spirit, I'm going to participate in those external things that you want me to do, and you'll be pleased."

Audience Member: *Don't you think we often get misdirected by a sense of scale?*

Sure.

Audience Member: *I'll be pleasing to God. I'm going to Africa and be a missionary, rather than just giving encouragement to a fellow worker who is under [UNCLEAR].*

Absolutely. You see, we live in a culture, in the Western world especially, we live in an EST society. The biggest, the best, the most. When was the last time you had a pastor come at a pastor's conference who's shepherding 50 people? No, you bring in the guy that's got 12,000. When was the last time you talked to a coach who built character into his kids' lives and he won four games and lost ten? No, you bring the guy who goes 12-0 because he's the most, he's the best, he's the biggest. You see, that's our human mindset. We've got to get over that. It's not about quantity, it's about quality. Be perfect. There's your standard guys. Post that on your forehead. Put that on your refrigerator. But right below that, put be careful. Gotta put that be careful.

Audience Member: *I think, in a way, by focusing on discerning what God wants us to do internally, that takes a little of the pressure off from what the external results are, because regardless of what our external results are as to why we do things, people are always going to look at it differently, so if we're doing everything to what God wants us to do, I mean, there's going to be people that look at us [UNCLEAR] God wants us to do and they're going to say we're stupid, they're going to say that's wrong or whatever. We can't so focus on just the internal. It kind of takes some of the pressure off [UNCLEAR] as long as we're doing what God wants us to do.*

One of the things about evaluating what we do ministerially by external results, here's logically how it happens. Let's say you're doing the right thing, and you don't get the response you want. What are you going to do? You're going to stop doing the right thing, because you didn't get the external response that you wanted. You see, that's what happens, when we start looking at things externally. We're doing the stuff that we ought to be doing, but nobody shows up and we don't have 12,000 people.

I have a little church in the inner city of Pittsburgh, probably 50 people. When you preach to the choir, you're preaching to the congregation, because you've got about 10 people in the congregation and 50 in

the choir. So when I teach them, I have to turn around. But I'll tell you what, they're doing some wonderful things. I've encouraged the pastor, "Just keep doing the right thing. You're doing the right thing." His comment is, "But I want to have a TV ministry. Don't worry about that. That may come. But don't worry about it. Do the right thing." If you start looking at the externals and think that you don't have 150 people or 200 or 1,000 or 10,000 people, you're going to stop doing the right thing." You see, brothers, the only way we can really, truly, evaluate ministry is under one thing. Was truth proclaimed? That's it.

Now, yes, we would like to have the masses come. But that may not be in God's sovereign grace. I have a friend who was one of my mentor's in preaching, who has a church of about 6,000. People are always asking him, "John, what did you do?" He said, "Nothing, but preach the truth." "Yeah, but I mean, what programs?" "We did nothing but preach the truth." "How come you have 6,000 people then?" He says, "That's just a function of the grace and sovereignty of God. It pleased God to do that." We cannot take credit for doing anything, because everybody comes and says, "Teach us what you did because we want to do the same thing because we need 6,000 people in our church." You see, we have that mindset, even in the body of Christ, we think that way. Jesus has really taken serious affront to that as saying you gotta ask yourself the question. Why am I doing what I'm doing? Because the real issue is if you really want to please me, then you've got to figure out what is that he's doing, and then you join that. That's no [UNCLEAR].

Audience Member: [UNCLEAR]...all through Scripture, go back to Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding," Romans 12:1-2, be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Yes. Exactly.

Audience Member: *So many places focus [UNCLEAR] it's so easy to get off track. Satan is there all the time trying to [UNCLEAR] in different direction, getting you to go that way. You've got to be careful.*

Amen.

Tom: *I would say also don't we get off course when we think that the preacher of the church of 6,000 is then doing a better job than the minister who's preaching to the 50? They're both doing what God wants them to do.*

Right. Exactly. I think I told you the story. Years ago, I went to a pastor's conference and there was this wonderful retired missionary, probably was in his 90's. He had spent something like 50 years in the jungles of South America, in the Rain Forest. He was just such a wonderful, compassionate, tender man, talking about shepherding your flock. It was just marvelous. And then one young buck, right out of seminary, said, "How many people did you lead to Christ?" And very graciously and humbly he said, "None that I know of." You know what the next response was? "What did you do wrong?" He said, "Son, I didn't do anything wrong. I had the privilege for 50 years of proclaiming the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to deaf ears. What a thrill! What a joy! What exhilaration I had daily, that I had the privilege of proclaiming the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Now the rest of the story was, after he retired, five years later, two of those men that he had proclaimed the Gospel to, came to saving faith. They started a church. Now they had a church of 250 people [UNCLEAR]. But he wasn't there. You see, sometimes guys, we need to understand this. The fruit of any ministry that we may have, we may not see the results of it. But that's okay. You've got to think that way. In America, that's anti-American, because you've got to see results in four years, or you don't get elected. You see, that mindset has come into the church. You've got to see some results right away.

You see, if you really understand ministry, it's the proclamation of truth. You and I might not ever see the fruits of what we are doing. We've got to live with that comfortably and say, "That's okay, because really, I am pleasing the Lord by doing what he's working in me. I'm finding out what he's doing around me, and I'm joining that. When I join that, I have the assurance, Lord, you're pleased." It doesn't mean you sit on your haunches and do nothing. It's when you see that God puts a desire in your heart, you never lose that warrior mentality and you pursue that desire and you fulfill it and you go to China like our missionary brother did.

That's what we're talking about here as we talk about the law. It's now inside of us, and we can't even take credit for our own obedience. As we look at Matthew 5 next week, the standard is this. Be perfect, but be careful.

Let's pray. Father, this is just overwhelming what you expect of us. But we do know this, that you never expect of us something that you don't equip us to do beforehand. So thank you, Father, that you have, by your grace, by the work of the Holy Spirit, by your act of regeneration, you have removed that heart of stone that was insensitive to spiritual things, least of all you, and you have replaced that with a heart of flesh that now has different desires that you have implanted within us. You now give us the desire to do things we've never done before. Father, all we can say is thank you that you are the source of those desires, not we ourselves. Give us the ability, Father, and the discerning spirit to know what those desires are that you're making us into so that we will be aggressive responders and do those things that are pleasing to you, so that at the end of this day, we can look at ourselves in the mirror and say, "I finished what you gave me to do, and therefore, you were glorified because I know that you were pleased." May it be so for Jesus' sake. Amen.