

WINTER 2025–2026

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount

LESSON 13

MARCH 01, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Matthew 5:1–12

FOCUS VERSES

Matthew 5:6; 6:33

⁶Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

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³³But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

Jesus redefined covenant as a law of love.

MY RESPONSE TO COVENANT

I will continue to cultivate a passion for Jesus and His righteousness.

COVENANT CONTEXT

In a similar manner as Moses, Jesus climbed a mountain and shared God's covenant with His people. Much of His Sermon on the Mount centered around living in the kingdom of God, which pointed out our internal motives direct our external actions. At the end of His life, Jesus specifically pointed to the gospel as the new covenant He was offering humanity.

TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: Whom do you want to emulate most in your life?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to first-century followers wanting to emulate and be around Jesus during His ministry on earth.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. JESUS' POPULARITY

- A. Jesus' Growing Popularity
- B. Jesus' Foundational Teaching

DISCUSS: *What is your favorite part of the Sermon on the Mount? What about the most challenging part?*

- C. I will recognize the words of Jesus as God's Word.

II. JESUS' TEACHING

- A. Jesus' Countercultural Teaching

DISCUSS: *How does a focus on the heart make "law keeping" more difficult yet more rewarding?*

- B. Jesus' Marvelous Teaching

- C. I will ask God to increase my desire for His righteousness.

DISCUSS: *How does Jesus' desire for righteousness affect our view of what is truly important in following Jesus?*

III. LOOKING TOWARD THE SPIRIT

A. Jesus Pointed Forward to His New Covenant

B. Walking in the Spirit

DISCUSS: In what ways can we cultivate a stronger connection to God's Spirit daily?

C. I will actively walk in the Spirit to live as Jesus taught.

DISCUSS: How does Scripture specifically help us "walk in the Spirit"?

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to enliven each heart with the truth of His Word
- For God to fill and refill each life with His personal presence

LESSON CONNECTION

Jacob remembers walking into "that class" for the first time. It was a simple introduction to theology course—the flagship course that beckoned the most eager of learners to its lectures. Professor Black had built a reputation as the most engaging, most impactful, and most uniquely interesting professor in all the school. He was known for using different voices for different Bible characters during his performative yet precise lectures. He had acquired quite the name for himself, although he had no hand in intentionally pushing his popularity—he simply loved what he did, so students loved his classes.

The first class was standard: running through the syllabus, going over requirements and expectations, and glancing at the course textbooks. What was not standard—or expected—was what happened at the end of class. Professor Black began to tell the young students that he believed in them and, better yet, God believed in them. After a time, he prayed: "Lord, I call down Your blessings." Soon into this prayer, the Spirit of God overwhelmed the students' hearts. Tears fell over the brims of eyes. Jacob could not explain that he was feeling the presence of God calling Him to purpose; he just knew somehow that moment was holy.

He continued to attend class faithfully. All the professors at the college were skilled and passionate about their subjects, but there was something special about Professor Black. Jacob was a freshman and desperate for knowledge, particularly about God, so he hung on every word Professor Black spoke. If the professor taught that gravity did not exist, Jacob would have tried to fly. Of course, Professor Black would never dream of teaching such false and silly things; Truth with a capital "T" was his passion.

Each class period came to an end with the same invocation of blessing and more overwhelmed hearts and brimming eyelids. Likewise, every class ended with a faithful horde of "disciples" who vied for more of their teacher's attention. Jacob was less courageous than the rest and remained near the back. The outskirts seemed safer to him. Each of the faithful mob wanted the great teacher's affirmation and to be identified with him; they wanted to be like him.

The professor could not cover many of them with his wing, but he did adopt a few, which afforded them special status in their small college community. By "adopting," Professor Black put them to work. Running classroom logistics, gathering needed materials, and communicating with other students appeared frequently on the rabbi's list of discipleship requirements. As long as they were close to the teacher, they were willing to do routine, even mundane, work for him.

Since so many students wanted to be close to the professor, Jacob was not able to be in the first group, but one day Professor Black kindly invited him to be a teacher's aide. It was the opportunity Jacob had longed for: an opportunity to follow a man who was passionately, faithfully following Jesus.

BIBLE LESSON

I. JESUS' POPULARITY

A. Jesus' Growing Popularity

Jesus' ministry garnered Him much popularity. Traveling the countryside, preaching and teaching with authority, healing people, and casting out devils are sure ways to stir up a following. Scripture records as much. After Jesus' first tour on the road, His fan base spread throughout all Syria. The next verse in Matthew 4 continues describing Jesus' rise to fame: "And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan" (Matthew 4:25).

B. Jesus' Foundational Teaching

As Jesus saw the crowds following Him, He ascended a mountain—a natural location for divine revelation (think about Mount Sinai). In a way, the crowd may have seen Jesus as the Old Testament Israel saw Moses: delivering God’s covenant to God’s people. After Jesus sat down, He began to teach some of the most famous lessons throughout all of history: Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:3–6). Their hope—the covenant kingdom of God—had arrived.

After continuing to teach on the kingdom of God, Jesus ended His discourse by highlighting the authority and sobriety of His words. Those who hear and heed would be like a house built on a firm foundation that stands in the storm, but those who hear and ignore would be like a house built on sand that collapses in the storm. Blessing and warning bookended Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Indeed, these words have been a keystone message for generations of Christians seeking to be Jesus’ disciples.

***DISCUSS:** What is your favorite part of the Sermon on the Mount? What about the most challenging part?*

C. I will recognize the words of Jesus as God’s Word.

Jesus’ final admonition on the dire consequences attached to His words strikes at our hearts. In Matthew 7:21–23, He taught that many will come to Him at the end of the age to enter the kingdom of God, and He will rebuke them as strangers. This frightful and weighty moment of rebuke was attached to what Jesus said next with a “therefore” (Matthew 7:24). This transitional word leads into Jesus’ teaching on the two responses to His words—house on the rock or house on the sand—and links our ability to enter the kingdom of God with us hearing and obeying His words. Since this is the case, let us live and love Jesus’ words all the more, for these words grant access to life in His kingdom. They are the words of God.

II. JESUS’ TEACHING

A. Jesus’ Countercultural Teaching

Many of the topics He addressed while on the mountain were in popular debate among religious leaders and faithful Jews of His day. Questions of divorce and remarriage, how to apply the Torah to first-century life, and questions regarding the kingdom of God all filled Israelite religious dialogue. But Jesus’ teaching was unique because He taught with authority, not like the other rabbis who simply taught what others wrote. When Jesus taught, it was as if He wrote the words Himself. (Quite truly He did for His words are the words of God.) Further, He taught with an intense focus on the heart: the internal motivations of keeping God’s law.

Our external behavior of keeping God’s law does matter to Jesus, but He knew the true source of keeping God’s law begins in the heart. Lust leads to adultery; hatred or viewing someone as worthless (calling them *raca* or fool) leads to murder. In many cases Jesus’ teaching was countercultural and stood against the religious leaders’ and teachers’ obsession with the strict *external* adherence to the Law. For the most part, the external requirements the religious leaders placed on the people were extrabiblical and went beyond the basic requirements of the Law, even contradicting it at times (Matthew 15:3–6). Jesus sought to return God’s holy law keeping to its rightful place, in the heart and, only then, in the hands.

***DISCUSS:** How does a focus on the heart make “law keeping” more difficult yet more rewarding?*

B. Jesus’ Marvelous Teaching

Jesus’ teaching often left His hearers astonished or amazed. Their amazement was due to the aforementioned reasons: Jesus taught with unique authority and placed a unique emphasis on the heart. In addition, Jesus also spoke in ways that were simply “strange” or at least seemed out of place given His audience. For example, Jesus taught the poorest of an oppressed and overtaxed people that they were the light of the world. Rome stood atop them in oppressive fashion, flaunting its riches and ability to stamp out the culture of the people they had conquered, but Jesus claimed no special status for His followers. Instead, the poor in spirit, the meek, and those who desire righteousness (right living and relationship between God and others) stand as exemplars of the good life, the covenant life.

C. I will ask God to increase my desire for His righteousness.

Since Jesus’ words are true, they should be our guiding light. Thankfully, Jesus gave us some signposts to lead us home. His teaching traversed a great deal of ground in Matthew’s three chapters, but much of it comes under the umbrella of the kingdom of God and the corresponding requirement of living a life of righteousness. Righteousness is living in right relationship with God and others, doing right by them.

To a people living under Roman rule, Jesus praised those who would hunger and thirst after righteousness, which He quickly followed up with a teaching on mercy to ensure their desire for righteousness was not a guised craving for revenge-based “justice.” Jesus continued to surprise and even anger His audience by praising the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who were persecuted “for righteousness’ sake,” pointing to them as those who will inherit the kingdom of God. More pointedly, Jesus placed two things as the pinnacle of all Christian pursuit when He said: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, *and his righteousness*; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). Even Christ’s baptism was to “fulfil all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). Through Jesus, God and humanity come back into full, right relationship.

In other words, the unquenchable striving to live in right relationship with God and others should guide us to live out Jesus’ commands. Perhaps we have heard it another way: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:37–40). Lord, help us desire righteousness with You

and with those around us—to love You with all and to love others around us.

DISCUSS: *How does Jesus' desire for righteousness affect our view of what is truly important in following Jesus?*

III. LOOKING TOWARD THE SPIRIT

A. Jesus Pointed Forward to His New Covenant

From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, He preached the arrival of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not simply a thing or a place believers are trying to get to—the kingdom of God “arrives,” after all. No, the arrival of the kingdom of God is the arrival of God's active reign, His authority in the realm of humanity. God's authority in Christ was manifested through exorcisms, healings, forgiveness of sins, and several other miracles and wonders as a demonstration that God's reign had truly and finally arrived. While this was good news, the fullness of God's kingdom would only come about after Jesus Christ had suffered, died, and risen. When knowing His crucifixion was at hand, Jesus invited His disciples to share a Passover meal with Him, with a twist. Jesus relabeled the traditional elements of the meal (bread and wine) that represented God's rescue of Israel out of Egypt to capture the significance of His own sacrificial death (Luke 22:1–20; compare to Exodus 12). Then Jesus made clear that the gospel is the New Covenant He had come to extend to humanity: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:20, NKJV).

Certainly Jesus performed many signs and taught amazing lessons to testify that God's kingdom had arrived, but His true purpose was to inaugurate a new covenant. This covenant was not new in the sense that God had just thought it up as a backup plan for humanity failing the Old Covenant. That would betray the Old Testament promises that kept pointing forward to this “new” covenant. But this covenant was new because it contained a new work of God as He lived righteously with humanity as a man, and He would soon offer the remission of sins through baptism in His name and the infilling of His Holy Spirit.

B. Walking in the Spirit

The giving of the Spirit—in tandem with the forgiveness of sins—allows us as believers to walk faithfully with Jesus Christ. Paul stated it plainly: “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25). In other words, Paul did not expect the reception of the Spirit to be the final experience with God; the entire life of a believer was to be led and empowered by the presence of God. Being born again (repenting of our sins, being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and receiving the Holy Spirit) is only the beginning of us following Jesus.

But how do we walk in the Spirit? A full answer would require entire libraries to work out the beauty and intricacies of what it means to walk in the Spirit, but it implies a constant connection with and dependence on God. We do that through prayer. The early church encountered God's presence in times of prayer (Acts 4:31). They were called to pray in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18). Paul prayed they would receive the strength and revelation the Spirit gives (Ephesians 1:15–17). Even when believers did not know what to pray, Paul taught that the Spirit would make “intercession for [them] with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26, possibly referencing speaking in tongues).

Worship is another way to encounter God's Spirit. Paul instructed the early church to worship and sing spiritual songs (Colossians 3:16). God Himself will inspire songs that edify and instruct His church. Amazing! Tied to Paul's teaching about Spirit-inspired singing is the initial admonition of the same verse: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” Reading, studying, and hearing the Scripture are perhaps the best ways to ensure we walk in the Spirit because the Word of God defines what a life in the Spirit looks like. The Word of God is our anchor.

DISCUSS: *In what ways can we cultivate a stronger connection to God's Spirit daily?*

C. I will actively walk in the Spirit to live as Jesus taught.

With the strength of God's Spirit on offer, our response should be thankfulness and obedience. We should pursue all avenues of allowing the Spirit of God to actively shape and lead our lives. How do we know the Spirit is doing that? Our lives will align with the teachings of Jesus and the whole of Scripture. We will want to be just like our Jesus as we walk closer daily with Him.

DISCUSS: *How does Scripture specifically help us “walk in the Spirit”?*

Teacher Option: *Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how we are called to follow Jesus, no matter how difficult it may be. The following story may be a continuation of the Lesson Connection or a stand-alone story.*

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Jacob knocked on Professor Black's office door Wednesday morning to report for duty. Jacob bade his boss good morning and asked what he could do. Hoping to be given a much-deserved—due to his many years of teaching experience—opportunity to lead the morning lecture, Jacob was disappointed to learn that his first task would be alphabetizing quizzes submitted at the end of the class period.

Nevertheless, Jacob faithfully continued in his service. On certain occasions he felt rewarded with walks out to Professor Black's car, teeming with intriguing conversation about how the class went, changes the professor would make in the future, and questions regarding Jacob's own interests and studies—the last being Jacob's favorite topic. After allowing young Jacob to ramble on about this or that theological topic, Professor Black would nod with approval and say, “That sounds fascinating. I believe in you.” With those words of affirmation, Jacob would wander off into the rest of his day inspired to pursue life with Professor Black's “stamp of approval.”

On one of those journeys from the classroom to the car, Professor Black noticed Jacob had little to say. The young student seemed distracted and uninterested in the conversation, even when the topic switched to his studies. Concerned, Professor Black asked, “Is everything OK, Jacob?”

The tidal wave released by that question caught both parties off guard. Jacob shared, “I feel like I’m not going anywhere in life, like I am not good enough to pursue my goals. Every time I try, I get stuck and discouraged. I don’t know what to do.”

In what would change young Jacob’s life, Professor Black leaned in to the young man’s despair. “Listen, there was a time when I didn’t think I could do what I am doing right now. If I’m honest, I almost gave up.”

“You did?” marveled Jacob. “Absolutely,” Professor Black retorted. “What made you stick it out?” Jacob was desperate for an answer at this point. The professor replied, “I knew that God had called me. He had called me into covenant, yes, but He also called me to do the very thing I thought was impossible.”

Seeing Jacob’s eyes glowing, Professor Black continued, “Jacob, God has called you to this. And because He has, you can do it. In fact, anything God requires of you, or anybody, is possible. Not because we are capable by ourselves, but because God has a keen interest in seeing it done—such an interest that He filled each of us with His personal presence. Following Christ is not always easy, but it’s possible. Keep at it, OK?”

With what felt like a prophetic oracle fashioned just for him in that moment, Jacob left that night renewed, knowing God was with him. Now Jacob’s encouragement is ours. We can follow Jesus because Jesus Christ Himself endows us with the ability to do so.