

***Doesn't Christianity Hinder Morality and Cause Violence - Matthew 5:2-16***  
**Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading**

**Notes from the Sermon**

A recent survey asking people about attitudes toward religion found that when asked if religion was part of the problem or part of the solution, over half believed that religion is part of the problem. Now, let's be honest about such a survey. The question is really broad, and the truth of the matter is that the answer is both. But ours is a culture where religion and those with deep convictional commitments are being viewed in negative terms and often being marginalized. The truth is that horrible things have been done in the name of God, religion, and even in the name of Jesus in our lifetime and throughout history. Some of the loudest and most judgmental preachers about the morality of others have failed miserably in their own moral lives. In the name of religion people have flown planes into buildings, been perpetrators of mass shootings, and marched on cities in war. We are preaching over two chapters from Rebecca McLaughlin's book *Confronting Christianity*, but these questions kind of run in the same lane. Doesn't religion hinder morality? And doesn't religion cause violence? And to be honest, our first response to this should be, yes, it has. But this is not all there is to the story.

Early in Jesus' ministry, he took his closest followers to the side of a mountain and gave the longest and most well known sermon in the Scripture. Known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus created a vision for the type of people His Kingdom would create. This sermon, found in Matthew 5-7 creates a vision of a humble people fully devoted to their King whose lives are marked with humility, character, love, spiritual vitality and intimacy, and mercy. Jesus begins the sermon with a section we call the Beatitudes, where he lays down 8 consecutive "Blessing" statements that create a sort of stair-step list of character traits revealed in the life of Jesus and developed in those who follow Him. What is striking is that these traits, along with the application of these traits in the rest of this sermon are a far cry from the types of values, characteristics, and activities valued by those who seek power in the culture. Our world does not value those who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are meek and gentle, who hunger for righteousness, who are merciful, and who are pure in heart. Yet, Jesus does not mince words about the sort of people His Kingdom will produce. They are to look like their King, their King who humbly submitted Himself to both religious and secular authorities who despised Him. He did not fight for power, rather He gave Himself away, sacrificing His life for the salvation the world. And those who truly know and follow Jesus will be shaped by this upside down, self-sacrificing, humble and merciful King and Kingdom.

Now, our first reaction to this is to wonder why it often does not look like this sort of Kingdom is working. There are many who claim Christ who take up the sword (or at least use militant language on Facebook and Twitter), and who use power as the means to their ends. Couple this with moral failures such as the sexual abuse scandals in the church in the past few decades, and it's not hard to see why people have left the church. Yet, a closer look will show us another reality as well, the fact that millions of people have trusted Jesus and their lives have been authentically changed by the Gospel. While never perfect, the majority of people headed to Gospel-centered churches this morning have been shaped by the values, character, and mission of Jesus. They are generous, find ways to care for the poor and marginalized, love their neighbors, and do good in the world. And this is not just a small scale thing. A recent study shows that 70% of charitable giving in our country is done by Christians, and that Christians give billions more to solve poverty and world hunger around the world than US gives in aid, and five times more than the Gates Foundation. The Christian worldview is the foundational basis for equality, freedom, and human rights. All it takes is a quick study of history to find that these values have never produced themselves in a culture. They only sprouted where Christianity had some level of influence in a culture, and only thrive where a strong belief in the truth that every human is created in the Image of God. Furthermore, all you have to do is drive around virtually any city in our country (and in myriads of impoverished

nations) to find that most of the hospitals, care centers, and ministries that serve the poor were started and run by those who believe in Jesus.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned His disciples that they would be persecuted for the sake of righteousness, yet, in their persecution they would be blessed. Yet, they are also to be salt and light in their culture. This is still true today. The more we are shaped by our King and take on the character of the Kingdom, the more our presence will shape the world around us. Yes, many who have claimed Jesus have been awful. But Jesus plainly declares at the end of this sermon that not all who claim Jesus know Jesus. For those of us who do love and know Jesus, we do not need to be ashamed of Christianity's record. From the First Century on, the humble and merciful lives of Christians have shaped the world and given a compelling argument for the truthfulness of Jesus as Savior and King.

**Bible Reading for the Week**

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Joshua 16	Joshua 17	Joshua 18	Joshua 19	Joshua 20	Joshua 21	Joshua 22

Reading from this past week: Matthew 5:2-16

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Job 3:1-26

**Family Worship**

Song - *The Lord, My God, My Salvation*

<https://youtu.be/RgikQg40ZEw>

Gospel Project

Unit: The Teachings of Jesus

Story: Jesus taught about character

Big Picture Question: What did Jesus teach when He was on earth?

Answer: Jesus taught about

God and His kingdom. He taught that all

Scripture is about Him.

Scripture: Matthew 5

New City Catechism

Question #28: What happens after death to those not united to Christ by faith?

Answer: They will be cast out from the presence of God, into hell, to be justly punished, forever.

Verse: John 3:16-18, 36

Scripture

Matthew 5:2-16

- There are all kinds of stories of people and groups who claim to know Jesus doing horrible things. How does the Gospel help us answer this question when people point to these atrocities as a reason not to believe?
- What are the character traits found in the Beatitudes that will shape the lives of those who know Jesus as their King?
- Why would people who live like this be persecuted by the world?
- What are some ways Christians have been salt and light to their cultures throughout the ages? What are some examples in the present of believers who are following Jesus and making a huge difference in the world? How can we be salt and light?

Prayer

\*Pray that we would be shaped by Jesus and that our actions, attitudes, and words would display His beauty to a skeptical world.

\*Pray for those serving Jesus and caring for hurting people through medical missions.