



Sermon on the Mount Study Guide – Week 4
September 30-October 6
Matthew 5:21-37
The Divine Conspiracy, pp. 144-176

Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount were meant to transform people's lives so that their hearts would be pointed in the right direction. Dallas Willard forcefully resists the notion that Jesus' words just replaced the old legalism with some new kind of legalism. Actions in and of themselves are not what Jesus seeks to change – rather the inner life of the soul. From transformation of the soul follows a transformation of behavior – not the other way around. A word that we encountered last week – *dikaiosune* – is the New Testament word used to describe the character of this transformed soul; it's the inner life the way it should be.

Just to remind you, *dikaiosune* roughly translated is “true inner goodness or righteousness.” It is this right heart and true righteousness that Christ seeks in us; the transformation of our desires and loves. It is not a collection of “right actions” or a nicer tone of voice. Nor is it a more consistent practice of Judeo-Christian values – at least, not things like that on their own.

Rather, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is announcing the Kingdom here and now. Jesus is after our complete redemption – our recreation – our restoration. He invites us to pursue after his own heart; to laugh with him and cry with him.

Fact: Jesus conquered death to save all who would believe. We couldn't achieve that on our own. No amount of trying on our part could have made us right with God. So God became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ to save us from our rebellion against him.

People of God's Kingdom are transformed. The way that we view things like anger, lust, coercion, and other human impulses changes in light of who we have become in Christ. This process is called sanctification (our participation with God to change for the better). This is all about how our lives change as children of God, as members of God's Kingdom, as people who have “true inner goodness.”

Discussing the Text:

1. Discuss Kingdom righteousness (*dikaioisune*, as Willard explains it on 144-147). As Christians, we don't follow a number of Old Testament laws. Do we just get to pick and choose which parts of the Law to keep?
 - a. In Matthew 5, Jesus works us through six situations in which the goodness that lives from the heart is contrasted with the old sense of 'righteousness'

<u>Situation</u>	<u>Old <i>Dikaioisune</i></u>	<u>Kingdom <i>Dikaioisune</i></u>
1. Irritation with one's associates (vv. 21-26)	No murder.	Intense desire to be of help. No anger or contempt.
2. Sexual attraction (vv. 27-30)	No intercourse.	No cultivation of lust.
3. Unhappiness with marriage partner (vv.31-32)	If you divorce, give "pink slip."	No divorce, as then practiced.
4. Wanting someone to believe something (vv. 33-37)	Keep vows or oaths made to convince.	Only say how things are or are not. No verbal manipulation
5. Being personally injured (vv. 38-42)	Inflict exactly the same injury on the offender.	Don't harm, but help, the one who has damaged you.
6. Having an enemy (vv. 43-48)	Hate your enemy.	Love and bless your enemy, as the heavenly Father does.

2. Dallas Willard makes a distinction between anger and contempt:
 - a. Anger = a spontaneous response that has a vital function in life
 - b. Contempt = the utter despising of someone to the extent that you don't care what happens to that personWillard sees contempt as the greater evil because it is dehumanizing. How does this affect the way we read Matthew 5:21-26? Discuss the difference between the healthy emotion of anger and the dehumanizing act of contempt.

Discussing the World:

1. Jesus' teaching on murder and anger sets the tone for the rest of the chapter (including next week's topics).
 - a. How does anger affect evils like adultery, lust, divorce, and oath-making?
 - b. How does understanding anger help inform how they are de-humanizing?

Action: Consider the Spiritual Discipline of Truth Telling

- The purpose of truth telling is to live an authentically truthful life
- Don't exaggerate
- Don't cheat on tests

- Refuse to gossip or pass gossip along to others