

**JESUS
TEACHES**



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Cross Year—Primary, Unit II

Text by the editors of the Episcopal Children's Curriculum

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CHAPTER 1

Traveling and Teaching

When Jesus was about thirty years old, he chose twelve disciples. They were with him as he traveled through the country and the villages. He talked with them each day. They called him Teacher.

Everywhere Jesus went, he prayed in the synagogue—the place where Jewish people gathered for prayers and for learning the Scriptures. Jesus read from scrolls written in Hebrew. Some scrolls were the books of the Law, and some were the books of the prophets.

Then Jesus would take a seat where all could see. From there he spoke about the meaning of the Scriptures. He taught the good news that God would bring about a great kingdom of peace and love and justice. He said the day would come when everyone in the world would know God.

But Jesus did more as he traveled. He also cured all kinds of sickness. People heard about his great deeds, and they brought others to be healed. Soon Jesus was being followed by great crowds who came from far and near.

One day as Jesus stood near a mountain, he looked out at all his followers. He motioned for them to gather around.

Jesus climbed up where he could be seen. He sat down and began to teach.

Jesus taught for a long time. Everyone who heard him was amazed. They exclaimed, “He is different! He teaches with power. He does not sound like our other teachers.”

What Jesus said that day is called the Sermon on the Mount. We can find it written down in *Matthew, chapters 5-7*.

For the next three years, Jesus continued to teach. Much of the time he told stories called parables. They made people ask questions and wonder about God. Every time we read his words or hear them in church, we learn more and more from Jesus, the Teacher.

CHAPTER 2

The Beatitudes

When Jesus began his Sermon on the Mount, he said:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

The people looked at one another. They were thinking, “Jesus understands. Many of us are poor. But he is like one of us. He says everyone should be poor in spirit, not proud like the rich. We are all important to God.”

So everyone listened very closely as Jesus went on to say:

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.” (See *Matthew 5:1-11*.)

We call each one of these teachings a “beatitude.” That is a word for a special happiness given by God. That is why some English Bibles have a different translation for Jesus' words, “Blessed are.” Instead, each of the beatitudes begins, “Happy are.”

“Happy are the peacemakers,” Jesus had said. “They will be called children of God.” To have peace, we must reach out to one another. When people cannot get along, others must work to help bring them back together. Friendship is far better than fighting. This is what God wants us to show to the world. If we do, we will be called God's children.

Jesus was teaching a new way of living. No wonder people were surprised by his words. He had even said that we can be happy when people harm us and say hurtful things. God sees and hears. God understands and comforts us.

CHAPTER 3

Like Salt and Light

How do you speak about truly helpful friends? Or neighbors who are always doing good for others? Or persons who seem full of joy?

Here is one way to describe such people: “They’re just the salt of the earth!”

Have you heard that expression? It comes from Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said to his followers, “You are the salt of the earth.”

(Matthew 5:13.)

Salt was very valuable in Jesus' day. Used in the right way, it kept food from spoiling. It made things taste better.

But not all salt was the same. Some of the salt in the Middle East where Jesus lived was of poor quality. Rain and sunshine and damp houses could cause salt to lose its taste. Nothing could be done with it except to throw it away.

In his teaching, Jesus compared us to the good salt: something helpful and full of flavor. That was a very high compliment. Being told we are the salt of the earth makes us want to do our very best for God and our neighbors.

Then Jesus said another wonderful thing to all who follow him: “You are the light of the world.” *(Matthew 5:14.)*

In Jesus' time, people used lamps made of clay. The wicks were soaked with olive oil. A lamp would be put on a stand so that everything in the house would still be visible as darkness closed in.

Certainly no one would light a lamp and cover it over with a basket. That would cause everything to be dark again.

If we are the light of the world, we help others to see how God wants us to live.

Another time, Jesus spoke about himself in the same way. He said, “I am the light of the world.” (See *The Gospel of John 8:12* and *9:5*.) To be the light of the world is to be like Jesus.

CHAPTER 4

The Second Mile

The crowds Jesus taught in his Sermon on the Mount knew about the Hebrew codes of law found in the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. One of those rules was about how to treat persons who harm you.

If someone hurts your eye, or breaks your tooth, what do you do? You return the same deed: hurt your enemy's eye, or break your enemy's tooth. That kind of justice is like balancing a scale, with equal weight on both sides. Pay back an injury with an equal injury, the code said.

For the Hebrews, this was a very generous kind of justice. Other peoples would try to hurt their enemies much more severely.

Now suddenly Jesus was teaching about a wholly different way of acting. We can make a chart of what he said in *Matthew 5:38-42*:

What Happens to You

- Your cheek is hit
- Someone demands a coat
- You are forced to walk a mile
- A beggar asks for your help
- You are asked to lend some money

What You Are to Do

- Turn the other cheek
- Give the coat and more
- Go a second mile
- Give it
- Make the loan

How could we ever do all Jesus asked? Some of the Church's great Saints have shown us how. But most of us are never able to live fully in such a gentle and loving way.

Still, we can try. Think about the times when we do chores or agree to a job that needs doing. Do we just go through the motions, barely finishing what is asked of us? We can do better by thinking of the best ways to work and the best help we can offer.

When we make this extra effort, it is called "going the second mile." Remember, that is the way Jesus said his followers should respond.

CHAPTER 5

In Secret

Imagine a town of Judah in Jesus' time. It is a warm day, and people can look out from open windows and doors to see all who pass by.

A parade of citizens is moving toward the synagogue for worship. Going ahead of them is a young man playing a trumpet. He was hired to do this.

Many are wearing rich clothing. Some are carrying bags that jingle with coins. They swing them high as they chant psalms and prayers.

The way the people are walking seems to say, "Look at us. We are on our way to give our gifts to the Lord. We are doing a good thing."

Jesus spoke about a scene like that in his Sermon on the Mount. He said:

"Beware of practicing your (religion) before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

"So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." (*Matthew 6:1-4.*)

"Alms" were offerings presented for good causes, especially for helping the poor.

The crowds who heard Jesus must have laughed a little when they heard Jesus describing "hypocrites." That was the word for play-acting—doing something just for show and not because you really cared. They all knew people who gave money just to get attention for themselves.

Give "in secret," Jesus said. Do not even let one hand know what the other is doing. God sees in secret and rewards the generous giver whose heart is with the offering.

Have you ever noticed printed lists of people who have given money for something important? The lists may even be carved in marble or bronze. Sometimes they include the word "Anonymous." That means someone gave without leaving a name. The gift was made in secret, just as Jesus asked us to do.

CHAPTER 6

How to Pray

Just after Jesus spoke on giving alms in secret, he taught in a similar way about our prayers to God. See the Sermon on the Mount, *Matthew 6:5-15*.

The crowd members' ears perked up when they heard the Teacher say, "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others."

Everyone knew this was a common thing in those days. Prayer was offered at fixed hours. Devout Jews stopped wherever they were at these times and recited proper prayers while standing. Of course, everyone could see and hear them.

Jesus asked his followers to be different. God is "in secret," Jesus said. So we should pray in secret. Our Father in heaven is not impressed by "empty phrases" and "many words."

Instead of offering prayers where everyone can hear, go into your own room and pray alone. Jesus was not speaking about the common prayers people said together inside the synagogues and the temple. His words were about the private prayers of individuals.

Jesus offered a pattern for praying that we now call The Lord's Prayer. It has seven parts, which are called "petitions":

1. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
2. "Your kingdom come.
3. "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
4. "Give us this day our daily bread.
5. "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
6. "And do not bring us to the time of trial,
7. "but rescue us from the evil one."

The first three petitions belong together. They declare the greatness of God. In the rest of the prayer, we ask God to help us—even though we know that God understands our need before we speak the words.

Jesus seemed to think of the fifth petition as the most important. He added, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." We are asked to be a forgiving people.

CHAPTER 7

No Need to Worry

As Jesus taught the crowd with his Sermon on the Mount, he knew many people who listened to him were filled with worry. They worried about many things, but especially: Will we have enough food? Will we have enough clothing?

Jesus said, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not the body more than food, and the body more than clothing?” (*Matthew 6:25.*)

Jesus raised an arm and pointed upward. As people looked into the blue sky, they could see sparrows flying all about. Jesus said, “Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.”

The Teacher was not saying that people should stop working. After all, birds work very hard to gather their food. It is right for people to go on sowing seeds and harvesting crops. But people should not worry harder than they work! Having done all they can, people can trust in God to provide what they need.

Then Jesus motioned to the mountainside and gazed about. Usually the land was a dull brown color. But now it was filled with wild flowers. Bright lilies waved in the breeze. For a moment, the people also studied the beauty of the place.

Jesus said, “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.”

The Teacher hoped his followers would think about the reign of God. If they spent their time piling up a lot of goods, this would only get in the way of what is truly important—trusting fully in God.

Jesus taught, “Strive first for the kingdom of God.” God will not only provide the kingdom but also enough of the world's goods to meet our daily needs.

His final words on the subject were: “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.”

Think about the people you know. What are they anxious about? Why? Compare their worries to the anxiety of many people in the world who really do not have enough to eat and wear. Some suffer very much and have no homes. What do you think Jesus would say now to the people who have so much?

CHAPTER 8

Do Not Judge

In the days of Jesus, the “Pharisees” and the “scribes” were the teachers who had most to say to people about God.

The Pharisees arose at a time when Greek ways of speaking and living were causing people to turn away from Hebrew and the study of the law of Moses. They called people back to the faith of their ancestors. As they did so, they made very strict rules. Their teaching was very stern, and they judged people in very harsh words.

The scribes copied the law of Moses and other parts of the Scripture. They became teachers and interpreters, and their influence grew. People thought of them as lawyers.

Both the Pharisees and the scribes found fault with Jesus. They did not like the way he taught. They criticized him often.

Jesus believed that these teachers were making it more and more difficult for people to know God as loving and just. They worked so hard at teaching little details that they forgot the large truths Moses had taught.

No doubt Jesus was thinking about Pharisees and scribes when he said to the crowd listening to the Sermon on the Mount:

“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.” (*Matthew 7:1.*)

Jesus taught that people who judge others severely can expect to be severely judged themselves.

We cannot keep from judging others. After all, we can certainly tell when people are hurting one another. Should we not remind them of what they are doing?

Yes, but we are asked to be responsible judges. We cannot go around making judgments about other people if we are unwilling to admit our own weaknesses. We all need to be corrected in loving ways.

Jesus had an amusing way of describing what happens when we look only at the faults of others before looking at our own. He said, “Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.” (*Matthew 7:3-5.*)

Someone else's faults could be like a speck. Your own faults could be like a log! The people must have smiled when they heard the Teacher say this.

CHAPTER 9

The Golden Rule

The Sermon on the Mount is about the reign of God, and how we are to live as God's faithful people.

Jesus said we can expect God to do great things for us. See *Matthew 7:7-11*. Here is a chart of the good news the Teacher shared:

What We Do

- Ask
- Search
- Knock

What God Does

- Gives what we ask
- Helps us find
- Opens doors for us

Jesus looked around at the families gathered on the mountain. Fathers and mothers sat with their children.

He asked, "Is there anyone here who would give rocks to your children if they asked you for bread?"

All shook their heads. Of course not!

Jesus then asked, "If your children asked you for fish to eat, would you give them snakes?"

No, no, the people thought. That would be horrible.

Jesus said, "If you then know how to give good gifts to your children, you can count on your Father in heaven to give good things to everyone who asks!"

Those wise words tell us so much about God. God who made us is always caring for us, just as faithful parents are always looking after their children.

We are God's children. Just as God is loving toward us, we are surely called to be loving toward God.

It is much the same way in our life with other people. We should treat others in the way we would want them to treat us.

We can surely say that the "punch line" of Jesus' teaching is found in *Matthew 7:12*:

"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets."

That is called the Golden Rule, the most famous saying of Jesus our Teacher.