

SERMON ON THE MOUNT: FIRST TASK & SIX SAYINGS (5:13-48)

First Task for Jesus' Disciples: Keep the Torah as Jesus Instructed (Matt 5:13-48) ¹

Summary:

A. Parable of salt (3:13)

B. Parable of light (3:14-16)

First Task: In Relation to the Torah, keep it as Jesus instructed (5:17-48)

A. General Principles (5:17-20)

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b. Are they antithetical?

c. Does Jesus intensify the Torah?

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a. Affirms the Torah (v. 21)

b. Identifies a vicious cycle (v. 22)

c. Offers transforming initiatives (vv. 23-24)

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a. Affirms the Torah (v. 27)

b. Identifies a vicious cycle (v. 28)

c. Offers transforming initiatives (vv. 29-30)

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a. Affirms the Torah (v. 31)

b. Identifies a vicious cycle (v. 32)

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a. Affirms the Torah (v. 33)

b. Identifies a vicious cycle (vv. 34-36)

c. Offers transforming initiative (v. 37)

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a. Affirms the Torah (v. 38)

b. Identifies a vicious cycle (v. 39a)

c. Offers transforming initiative (v. 39b-42)

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a. Affirms the Torah (v. 43)

b. Offers transforming initiatives (vv. 44-45)

c. Identifies a vicious cycle (v. 46-47)

d. Summary injunction (v. 48)

¹ Outline is a modification of Dale C. Allison, "The Structure of the Sermon on the Mount," *JBL* 106 (1987): 423-45 and Glen H. Stassen, "The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount," *JBL* (2003).

Summary: Be salt and light (5:13-16)

Matt 5:13-16 5:13 You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. 5:14 You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 5:15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

A. Parable of Salt (v. 13)

What is the significance of “salt” in this parable? Allison provides eleven possibilities:²

- Salt is an element added to sacrifices (Lev 2:13; Ezek 43:24)
- There is mention of “salt of the covenant” (2 Chr 13:5; Jub 21:11; 11Qtemple 20:13)
- Elisha performs a miracle and uses salt to purify bad water (2 Kgs 2:19-23)
- Salt is a condiment for food (Job 6:6)
- Salt is a preservative (Ignatius, *Magn* 10)
- Water and fire and iron and salt are basic needs (Ecclus 39:26)
- Eating salt with someone is a sign of loyalty (Ezra 4:14)
- Salt is linked with peace (Mark 9:50)
- Speech should be seasoned with salt (Col 4:5)
- Salt is associated with wisdom (*m. Sota* 9:15)
- Salt is beloved of the gods (Plato *Tim* 60E).

B. Parable of Light (vv. 14-16)

First Task: In Relation to the Torah, keep it as Jesus instructed (5:17-48)

A. General Principles: Jesus and the Torah (5:17-20)]

1. Christians and the law

2. Jesus fulfills the Torah (v. 17)

Matt 5:17.¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish (*katalusai*) the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish (*katalusai*) but to fulfill (*plērōsai*) (Matt 5:17; NRSV).

The word for abolishing (*katalusai*) means “to throwing down, destroy, or doing away with something.”³

What does “fulfill” (*plērōsai*) the Torah mean? Dale Allison gives six possibilities:⁴

- (1) Fulfill means “add.” Jesus’ imperative go beyond and so add to Moses’ law. Jesus intensifies the Mosaic law.
- (2) Fulfill means “to do, execute, obey”. Jesus/followers will fulfill the law in that they will obey it as Jesus taught.
- (3) Fulfill means that Jesus brings the law to perfection with a new law of his own.
- (4) Fulfill means that Jesus enables others to keep the Torah.

²W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison. *The International Critical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. Volume I:I-VII (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988) 472-3.

³F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick William Danker (eds.), *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (2nd Edition; University of Chicago Press, 1965).

⁴Dale C. Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Crossroad, 1999) 59.

- (5) Fulfill refers to love; Jesus reduces everything to love, which is the fulfilling of the law.
- (6) Fulfill refers to Jesus fulfilling the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible.

3. The Torah continues to be valid (v. 18)

Matt 5:18.¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished (*genētai*) (Matt 5:18; NRSV).

4. Keep and teach the Torah (v. 19)

Matt 5:19.¹⁹ Therefore, whoever breaks (*lusei*) one of the least of these commandments, and teaches (*didaxe*) others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does (*poiēse*) them and teaches (*didaxe*) them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Deut 6:7-9.⁷ Recite them [commandments] to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. ⁸ Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, ⁹ and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (NRSV)

5. Greater Righteousness (v. 20)

Matt 5:20.²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (NRSV).

Matt 23:23.²³ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. (NRSV)

Matt. 23:2-5.² "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; ³ therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. ⁴ They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. ⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.

Righteousness (Heb. *tzedakah*; Gk. *dikaiosuē*) refers to a "right" or "just" relationship with God, others, and one self. It is peace, harmony, covenant faithfulness, and reconciliation.

Excurses: How many commandments?

According to Jewish tradition (e.g., Maimonides' twelfth-century *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot* or *Book of Commandments*, there are 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions in the Torah (613 total).⁵ In Hebrew, *tzedakah* (righteousness) is reflected in the commandments, but has come to mean "charity."⁶

Example of positive *mitzvot*: "Believe in God, love God, study and teach Torah, build a sanctuary for God,

⁵ Ted Falcon and David Blatner, *Judaism for Dummies* (New York: Hungry Minds, 2001) 45.

⁶ See inset in Falcon and Blatner, *Judaism*, 46.

Excurses: How many commandments?

participate in synagogue services, say the blessing after meals, spiritually cleanse in a ritual bath (*mikvah*), leave gleanings for the poor, tithe to the poor, rest on Shabbat eat *matzah* on Passover, fast on Yom Kippur, and give charity.”⁷

Example of negative *mitzvot*: Don’t believe in any other God, don’t worship idols, don’t get tattoos (or decorative scars), don’t enter the sanctuary intoxicated, don’t delay payment of vows, don’t eat an unclean animal, don’t eat blood, don’t eat leavened products on Passover, don’t fail to give charity, and don’t convict someone on the testimony of a single witness.”⁸

Of the 613 commandments, over 200 cannot be observed any more because it would require priests in a functioning Temple in Jerusalem. Additionally, 26 of the 613 require living in the land of Israel (e.g., leaving a portion for a field unharvested for the poor).⁹

“All the negative commandments pertain to both men and women, but women are exempt from the positive, time-specific *mitzvot* because of the demands of child-rearing and taking care of the home. This is why it’s not incumbent on women to wear the *tallit* (prayer shawl) or attend daily synagogue worship.”¹⁰

B. Six triads of antitheses/sayings (5:21-48)

0. Preliminary questions¹¹

a. What is the structure of the six sayings?

b. Are they antithetical?

c. Does Jesus intensify the Torah?

m. Abot 1:1. ... [the men of the Great Synagogue] "said three things: Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the Law."

d. Does Jesus present “transforming initiatives”?

Traditional Righteousness ¹²	Vicious Cycle	Transforming Initiative
<p>Matt 5:21. ²¹ "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.'</p> <p>(Above: In Greek, “shall not” and “shall be” are not imperatives, but futures; but</p>	<p>Matt 5:22. ²² But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire.</p>	<p>Matt 5:23-26. ²³ So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ <u>leave</u> your gift there before the altar and <u>go</u>: first <u>be reconciled</u> to your brother or sister, and then come and <u>offer</u> your gift. ²⁵ <u>Come to</u></p>

⁷ Falcon and Blatner, *Judaism*, 45.

⁸ Falcon and Blatner, *Judaism*, 45.

⁹ Falcon and Blatner, *Judaism*, 45.

¹⁰ Falcon and Blatner, *Judaism*, 45.

¹¹ W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The International Critical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, Vol. 1, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988) 506-7.

¹² Glenn H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity 2003) 125-145.

Traditional Righteousness ¹²	Vicious Cycle	Transforming Initiative
they do imply a command.)	(Above: No imperatives in the Greek.) (Right: Underlining mark imperatives)	<u>terms</u> quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. ²⁶ Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

1. Murder & Anger: Righteousness creates peace (5:21-26)

5:21 "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' 5:22 But [And] I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. 5:23 So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 5:24 leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. 5:25 Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. 5:26 Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. (NRSV)

- a. Affirms the Torah

- b. Identifies a vicious cycle

- c. Offers transforming initiatives
 - (1) First Initiative

 - (2) Second Initiative

2. Adultery & Lust: Righteousness remedies craving (5:27-30) [\[return to outline\]](#)

5:27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 5:28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust [*pros to empithumēsai*] has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 5:29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 5:30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell. (NRSV)

- a. Affirms the Torah

b. Identifies a vicious cycle

(1) What is lust (*epithumia*)?

Epithumia, refers to *strong desire or unrestrained craving*. “Jesus is not talking about emotions, but intentions.”¹³ First, the use of the present tense indicates this is not a momentary glance, but a continuous gaze. Second, the use of the prep + an articular infinitive indicates purpose. That is, “Lustful looking is looking with an intention to act.”¹⁴

(2) What’s wrong with *epithumia*?

Inner: *Epithumia* is an attachment (addiction) to something we are unwilling to give up, something we say to ourselves “we must have” in order to be happy. It takes control of us. We lose our freedom. It causes us to do things that are inconsistent with our values. *Epithumia* makes us unhappy. It is never satisfied. It always wants more. In this way, *epithumia* undermines our own inner peace and freedom.

Outer: When *epithumia* is directed at another person the other person becomes an object for self-gratification. *Epithumia* treats a subject like an object, a person like a thing. *Epithumia* undermines healthy relationships.

Implicitly, Jesus is saying that people are responsible for their natural impulses.¹⁵ People have some control over their desires. Desire is not the master. Humans are free and not determined by hormones or neurobiology.

c. Offers a transforming initiative

5:29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 5:30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell. (NRSV)

3. Divorce: Righteousness keeps commitments (5:31-32) [[return to outline](#)]

Matt 5:31-32. ³¹ "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'
³² But [And] I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (NRSV)

a. Affirms the Torah

Deut 24:1. Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him [lit. "finds no favor in his eyes"] because he finds something objectionable [lit., "a naked thing"] about her, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house

¹³ Allison, *Sermon on the Mount*, 74.

¹⁴ Charne Roberts, "Heads without Eyes and Arms without Hands" in *Preaching the Sermon on the Mount*, edited by David Flerer & Dave Bland (St.Louis: Chalice, 2007) 111.

¹⁵ So Dale C Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Crossroad, 1999) 74.

b. Identifies a vicious cycle

(1) A divorce certificate didn't alter the fact of marriage

(2) Except on the ground of unchastity (*porneias*)

(3) Six considerations

- Jesus believed marriages remain intact despite certificates of divorce.
- Jesus believed if there was *porneias* (marital unfaithfulness) the “innocent partner” was free to remarry.
- Jesus’ focus was on protecting women, who were being forced out of the house and unable to provide for themselves.
- Jesus is primarily trying to stop a vicious social practice, rather than making an absolute legal pronouncement; that is, Jesus is concerned about covenant relations and the vicious cycles that break relationships.
- We should not draw any final conclusions about marriage, divorce, or remarriage from this text alone. There are other biblical texts to consider in a comprehensive treatment of the topic.¹⁶
- After considering the teaching on divorce was clarified, expanded, and qualified in at least four different ways—(i) Mk. 10:11-12; 1 Cor. 7:10, (ii) Lk 16:18b, (iii) 1 Cor. 7:10-16), and (iv) Mt 5:32, 19:19—Allison concludes by saying, “Early Christian tradition did not everywhere receive the ruling against divorce as a *sancti* inviolate law to be applied literally, without imagination.”¹⁷

c. Transforming initiative implied

4. Oaths: Righteousness speaks the truth

Matt 5:33-37. 5:33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' 5:34 But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 5:35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 5:36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 5:37 Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one. (NRSV)

a. Affirms the Torah

Lev. 19:12 And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the LORD.

b. Identifies a vicious cycle

Matt 23:16-17. ¹⁶ "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the sanctuary is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the sanctuary is bound by the oath.' ¹⁷ You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that has made the gold sacred?" (NRSV).

¹⁶ E.g., Gen 2:23-24; Deut 24:1-4; Mal 2:16; Luke 16:18; Mark 10:11-12; Matt 19:1-12; 1 Cor. 7:10-11, 15; 1 Cor. 7:39 and Rom 7:2; and Church Fathers.

¹⁷ Allison, *Sermon on the Mount*, 81.

c. Offers a transforming initiative

In the Hebrew tradition, truth (Heb. *emeth*) is inextricably linked to “faithfulness” (Deut 32:3). You could even say, *truth is faithfulness—faithfulness to facts* (speaking the truth) and *faithfulness to relationships* (being loyal). Jesus invites his disciples to “speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15).

d. Questions

- (1) What about oaths in the OT?
- (2) What about Anabaptists and oaths?
- (3) What’s wrong with dishonesty?
- (4) What good is honesty?
- (5) Are there “permissible” lies?

5. Retaliation: Righteousness takes nonviolent action (5:38-42) [[return to outline](#)]

Matt 5:38-42. 5:38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 5:39 But I say to you, Do not resist (*antistēnai*) an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; 5:40 and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat (*chitōn*), give your cloak (*himation*) as well; 5:41 and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. 5:42 Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

a. Affirms the Torah (v. 38)

Exod 21:23-24. ²³ If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, ²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. (NRSV) ¹⁸

This is the principle of *proportionate justice* or *lex talionis*.

b. Identifies a vicious cycle (v. 39a)

(1) Traditional: “do not resist an evildoer”

Traditionally, *antistēnai* is translated “resist”. Jesus is saying, “Do not resist or oppose evil.” In this view, Jesus is advocating *nonresistance* or *nonretaliation* against evil (KJV, NIV, NRSV).

(2) Alternative: “do not react violently against/with evil”

First, what is the meaning of “evil” (*tō ponērō*; τὸ πονηρὸν). The noun, *ponēros*, can mean (*the*) *evil one*, (*the*) *evil doer*, or *evil*. More importantly, the noun *ponēros* is in the dative case, *ponērō*, which can be taken in several ways:

¹⁸ See also Lev 24:19-20; Deut 19:21.

- i. Dative of disadvantage: “against evil”
- ii. Dative of association: “with evil” (indicates person or thing accompanying the action)
- iii. Dative of manner: “with evil” (indicates how the action happens)
- iv. Dative of means: “with, by, by means of evil” (indicates the instrument of action); the context suggest this 4th reading

Second, we have to address the meaning of the word “resist” (*antistēnai*; ἀντιστηναι). The word, *antistēnai*, comes from *anti-* meaning “against” and *stēnai* meaning “to stand fast” (middle or passive). It was a military term meaning, “to stand ready for battle.” When *anti-* and *stēnai* are conjoined, we get *antistēnai*, which means “to stand ready for battle over against (an opposing force).”¹⁹

So Jesus is saying, “Do not resist violently. Do not revolt. Do not offer armed resistance.” Put with the dative “evil” (*ponērō*) Jesus is saying, “Do not resist violently *by means of evil*.”

Jesus calls his followers to resist evil in nonviolent ways in harmony with Hebrew Bible:

- Lev 19:18 “you shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself”
- Prov 20:22: “Do not say, ‘I will repay evil’; wait for the Lord, and he will help you.”

c. Offers transforming initiatives (vv. 39b-42)

(1) Initiative: Turn your other cheek (v. 39b)

(2) Initiative: Give your clothes (40)

(3) Initiative: Go the second mile (v. 41)

(4) Initiative: Give to everyone who asks (v. 42)

d. Questions

(1) Does this deal with personal or communal ethics?

(2) What about participation in war?

(3) How have Anabaptists understood Jesus’ teaching on nonviolence?

6. Enemies: Righteousness loves enemies (5:43-48)

Matt 5:43-48. 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 5:44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 5:45 so that

¹⁹ N.T. Wright and Walter Wink concur. See Walter Wink, “Neither Passivity nor Violence: Jesus’ Third Way Matt 5:38-42 par.” in *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament*, Willard M. Swartley (ed.) (Louisville: Westminster/John Know, 1992) 102-125; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996) 291.

you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. 5:46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 5:47 And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 5:48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (NRSV)

a. Affirms the Torah

Matt 5:43. ⁴³ You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

1 QS 1:9-10. "... to love all the sons of light ... to detest all the sons of darkness."²⁰

Lev. 19:18. ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

b. Offers a transforming initiative

c. Identifies a vicious cycle

d. Summary injunction: Be complete (v. 48)

²⁰ Florentino Garcia Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated* (Second Edition, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 3.