

Dear Heavenly Father,

Praise

Jesus told the crowd, “Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:35–36). I praise you for being kind to me, a sinner who deserved your wrath. How wonderful to serve a God who is merciful to his enemies! Hallelujah!

Today in Your Word

Today you shared with me the first part of Jesus’ sermon on the mount. Jesus began with a series of blessings and woes which showed the people *who* would be a part of the kingdom of God. It would not be the rich, the well-fed, the laughing, or the popular. Instead, it would be those who were poor in spirit, hungry for righteousness, weeping over sin, and persecuted for their faith. What a shock that must have been for Jesus’ audience! In those days, wealth and happiness were considered a sign of your approval and thus a mark of righteousness. Imagine their surprise as Jesus “blessed” (approved) those who were the very opposite of their concept of godliness. From the beginning of his sermon, Jesus wanted the people to understand that it was the condition of their hearts that made the difference. Inner purity, not outward appearance, was the mark of a true citizen of the kingdom. Jesus then encouraged the people to be salt and light to the world. They were to act in such a way that their faith would be seen by all. Instead of seeking their own glory, they were to do “good works” that would “glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16). At this point, Jesus could no doubt sense the people’s silent question: ‘Aren’t those who keep the Law approved of God and sure to enter the kingdom?’ Jesus addressed this question, for he wanted them to understand that he had not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it, and he prefaced his answer with a startling statement: “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:20). I can almost hear the people gasp, for the Pharisees kept the Law with fervent zeal. How could they exceed such devotion? Jesus explained that the Pharisees indeed kept the Law, and even added laws of their own, but their hearts were far from you. They didn’t murder, but they did hate; they didn’t commit adultery, but they did lust after their neighbor’s wife; they didn’t divorce illegally, but they did twist the Law in order to get rid of a wife they didn’t like; they didn’t make false vows, but they did craft their speech to avoid keeping their word; they didn’t let crime go unpunished, but they did return evil for evil; they didn’t hate those who were good to them, but they did hate their enemies. In each case, Jesus revealed how the scribes and Pharisees missed what the Law was all about. The Law was meant to show them how to love God and others, but they had twisted it to suit their own selfish desires. Instead of imitating their heavenly Father, they had imitated their hellish father.

Reflection

Jesus spent all night in prayer before he chose the twelve apostles. This teaches me to earnestly seek your guidance before I make decisions, especially decisions that affect my ministry and your kingdom.

Request

Father, help me to hunger and thirst after righteousness and to bless those who insult and persecute me. Give me the grace I need to be more like your Son, Jesus Christ!

Thanksgiving

Thank you for showing me the way to enter the kingdom of God! I can’t wait to spend the rest of eternity serving you! Praise the Lord!

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Suggested Hymn: “[Let Your Light Shine](#)” – Barney E. Warren.

Meditation Verse: Matthew 5:48.