

STUDY GUIDE

Monday, August 15 – Read Matthew 5:1-12. Enormous crowds were following Jesus – he was the talk of the town, and everyone wanted to see him. The disciples, who were the closest associates of this popular man, were certainly tempted to feel important, proud, and possessive. Being with Jesus gave them not only prestige but also opportunity for receiving money and power. The crowds were gathering once again. But before speaking to them, Jesus pulled his disciples aside and warned them about the temptations they would face as his associates. Don't expect fame and fortune, Jesus was saying, but mourning, hunger and persecution. Nevertheless, Jesus assured his disciples that they would be rewarded – but perhaps not in this life. There may be times when following Jesus will bring us great popularity. If we don't live by Jesus' words in this sermon, we will find ourselves using God's message only to promote our personal interests – and that never leads to peace (or happiness).

Tuesday, August 16 – Read Matthew 7:21-26. Jesus exposed those people who sounded religious but had no personal relationship with him. On “judgment day” only our relationship with Christ – our acceptance of him as Savior and our obedience to him – will matter. Many people think that if they are “good” people and say religious things, they will be rewarded with eternal life. In reality, faith in Christ is what will count at judgment. To build “on solid rock” means to be a hearing, responding disciple, not a phony, superficial one. Practicing obedience becomes the solid foundation to weather the storms of life. Like a house of cards, the fool's life crumbles. Most people do not deliberately seek to build on a false or inferior foundation; instead, they just don't think about their life's purpose. Many people are headed to destruction, not out of stubbornness but out of thoughtlessness. Part of our responsibility as believers is to help others stop and think about where their lives are headed and to point out the consequences of ignoring Christ's message.

Wednesday, August 17 – Read Romans 5:12-19. Paul has shown that keeping the law does not bring salvation. Here he adds that breaking the law is not what brings death. Death is the result of Adam's sin and of the sins we all commit, even if they don't resemble Adam's. Paul reminds his readers that for thousands of years the law had not yet been explicitly written, and yet

people died. The law was added to help people see their sinfulness, to show them the seriousness of their offenses, and to drive them to God for mercy and pardon. This was true in Moses' day and is true today. Sin is a deep discrepancy who we are and who we were created to be. The law points out our sin and places the responsibility for it squarely on our shoulders. But the law offers no remedy. When we are convicted of sin, we must turn to Jesus Christ for healing.

Thursday, August 18 – 1 John 4:9-10. Love explains (1) why God creates – because he loves, he creates people to love; (2) why God cares – because he loves them, he cares for sinful people; (3) why we are free to choose – God wants a loving response from us; (4) why Christ died – his love for us caused him to offer a solution for the problem of sin; and (5) why we receive eternal life – God's love expresses itself to us forever. Nothing sinful or evil can exist in God's presence. He is absolute goodness. He cannot overlook, condone, or excuse sin as though it never happened. He loves us, but his love does not make him morally lax. If we trust in Christ, however, we will not have to bear the penalty for our sins. We will be acquitted by his atoning sacrifice.

Friday, August 19 – Read Romans 5:1-2. We now have peace with God, which may differ from peaceful feelings such as calmness and tranquility. Peace with God means that we have been reconciled with him. There is no more hostility between us, no sin blocking our relationship with him. Peace with God is possible only because Jesus paid the price for our sins through his death on the cross. Paul states that, as believers, we now stand in a place of highest privilege. Not only has God declared us not guilty; he has drawn us close to himself. Instead of being enemies, we have become his friends – in fact, his own children.