

5:1 *The mountain*- The article suggests a specific one in mind- perhaps the great mountain Jesus had in mind in 4:8? Jesus taught up a mountain, suggesting that His teaching is accessible to those who make some effort to receive it. The Sermon on the Mount is the equivalent of the giving of the Law, also on a mountain. As God / the Angel gave the law to Moses, so Jesus did to the disciples. The disciples ascending the mount to receive the teaching parallels them with Moses, with the implication they too were to relay it to Israel. Instead of the people being forbidden to come up the mountain, they were allowed to- for by the end of the Sermon we learn that the multitudes were also there (7:28,29) and descended from the mountain (8:1). The Rabbis also *sat* to teach- but they taught always indoors. The similarities and differences are being emphasized to demonstrate how Jesus was in continuity with Jewish culture and yet also radically different. The scene of Ex. 20 is of Moses ascending the mount to receive the Law, the first part of which was the ten commandments. The beatitudes seem to be the New Covenant's equivalent of the ten commandments- see on 5:22. The Lord's sermon quotes or alludes to all of the ten commandments (excluding the Sabbath) and redefines them (5:21,27). The way the Lord makes no comment upon the command to keep the Sabbath is surely significant. Simplistically, one could argue that He was suggesting that His followers would not be bound by the Sabbath commandment. But it was well understood in the first century that priests on duty were free from the Sabbath legislation. The hint could therefore be that the Lord believed that because His obedient listeners were to live their lives as the new priesthood, they were therefore free from Sabbath legislation. The Lord was surely very conscious that John had come to prepare the way for Him, in terms of Isaiah 40. And yet that same prophecy saw the good news being declared to Jerusalem from a mountain (Is. 40:9). Perhaps the Lord was seeking to consciously fulfil this by going up a mountain and proclaiming blessedness and good news to spiritual Jerusalem. It could be further noted that the Gospel of Matthew features five sections of recorded speeches of Jesus, each concluded by the phrase "When Jesus had finished these sayings" (Mt. 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). It may be that Matthew is seeking to present the Gospel as a new Torah, with five 'books' to it just as there were in the old Torah.

5:2 *Opened His mouth*- As if this struck Matthew, recalling how this manifesto of His teaching first fell from His lips. There may be the implication that what He said was by direct revelation from God.

5:3- see on 5:43.

*Poor*- Our prayers should be like those of a man on death row in a dark dungeon, waiting to die, but groaning for salvation (Ps. 102:17,20). This is the extent of our desperation. We are "the poor" (Gk. 'the crouchers'), cringing in utter spiritual destitution (Mt. 5:3). And yet we have a terrible tendency to only occasionally *really* pray, content with prayer on a surface level. The Lord's parables invite us to see ourselves as, e.g., the desperate widow woman pleading for deliverance from her oppressive landlord (Lk. 18:3).

5:4 *Mourn*- Associated in the Old Testament with mourning for sin (Ex. 33:4,5; Ezra 10:6; Neh. 8:9; Ps. 38:5,6). The comfort offered in Isaiah was specifically comfort for sinners who realized their desperation (Is. 12:1; 40:1). The time of God's grace was extended, therefore, to those who mourned for their sins (Is. 61:2,3; 66:10). Such Godly sorrow is the sorrow of repentance (2 Cor. 7:10).

*Comforted*- We noted in chapter 4 that the Lord had in mind the way that John had prepared the way for Him in terms of the prophecy of Isaiah 40, which spoke of comfort to God's doubting people. If this comfort were accepted, then the glory would come to Zion and John's work would have prepared a highway of repentant people over which the Lord Jesus could have come to Zion and established the Kingdom there and then. Comfort to the mourners was one of Isaiah's descriptions of that possible Kingdom. It could have all happened in the first century, but Israel would not- and so the final fulfilment of this comfort will be at Christ's return and the establishment of God's Kingdom fully on earth. "Be comforted" may be a prophecy of the Comforter which was to give a measure of comfort even in this life (Jn. 14:16).

5:5 *The meek*- Those humbled by their sins. James, in his commentary on the Sermon, alludes here by saying that God gives grace to the meek, and therefore sinners should cleanse themselves (James 4:6,8-10).

*Inherit the earth*- Clearly a reference to the promises to Abraham. But it was no good just being a physical descendant of Abraham- humility was the required characteristic. To the Lord, humility was the very *epitome* of righteousness (Mt. 5:5 cp. Ps. 37:29), as Malachi saw pride as the epitome of wickedness (see the parallelism in Mal. 4:1). There is a telling parallelism in Zeph. 2:3 which equates Yahweh God of Israel with humility: "Seek ye Yahweh... seek meekness".

5:6 *Hunger*- Notice how some of the Lord's very first words on opening His ministry were "Blessed (Lk. 1:48) are they which do *hunger* (Lk. 1:53) and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be *filled* (Lk. 1:53)" (Mt. 5:6). Clearly He is alluding to His mother's own description of herself. It's as if He stands up there before the hushed crowd and lays down His manifesto with those words. This was the keynote of what He had to say to humanity. Everybody was waiting to hear what His message really was. And this is what He said. He was saying 'This, guys, is what I essentially and most fundamentally seek to inspire in you'. And He saw His dear mother as the epitome of the converts He was seeking to make. I lay great store by this allusion. For it makes Mary, at least at the time of the Angel's visit, truly our pattern. She heard the glad tidings and believed that word in faith, holding on to it in her heart (Lk. 8:15,21). She was a model for all who hear the Gospel. It could even be that the language of Lk. 1:32,33,35 is framed in such a way as to make Mary appear to be the first person who heard the gospel about Jesus.

*Thirst after righteousness*- The characteristics of the 'blessed' in the first four beatitudes are that they will be spiritually poor (:3), mourning (often used in connection with contrition for sin), humbled, and thirsting to be more righteous than they are. "Righteousness" could mean 'justice' but the term is used by Paul to specifically refer to 'justification from sin'. These descriptions immediately give us all the encouragement that this message of the Kingdom is for me, even me. The next blessing is for the merciful, the forgiving, because they shall obtain mercy- i.e. final cleansing from sin and justification on judgment day. Although of course this is possible even now. See on 5:9 *peacemakers* and on 6:12.

*Be filled*- S.w. Mt. 14:20 about the 'filling' of the multitude who came to hear the word of Jesus. All the Kingdom blessings have some fulfilment in this life. John's version of this is the record of the Lord saying that the salvation He provides would satisfy those who hungered and thirsted for it (Jn. 6:35).

*5:7 Blessed are the merciful*- This is apparently missing in Luke's record. He says instead that the reviled and excluded will be blessed (Lk. 6:22). Samuel Lachs suggests another original text actually read "Happy are they who are excommunicated for they shall receive mercy" (1). There's a clear connection with Ps. 18:25: "With the merciful you will show yourself merciful. With the perfect man, you will show yourself perfect". This verse was clearly in the Lord's mind, and it may shed light on His later challenge to be perfect as the Father is perfect (Mt. 5:48)- in this case, He would be inviting us to forgive others as God does. Paul in 2 Tim. 1:16 saw Onesiphorus as the merciful man of Mt. 5:7; and the Jerusalem ecclesia (Heb. 10:34) as the persecuted people of Mt. 5:12.

*5:8 Pure in heart*- Heb. *bare lev*, also translated 'broken hearted' in Is. 61:1. A pure heart can also be understood in the context of what happens on repentance and receipt of forgiveness, for Ps. 51:10 uses the term to describe David's position after his repentance and forgiveness (also in Ps. 73:13).

*See God*- Again the Lord is encouraging the disciples whom He was addressing to see themselves as Moses (see on 5:1), for Moses was held in Judaism as the only one who had seen God (Ex. 33:11).

*5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers*- Samuel T. Lachs suggests another original text actually read "Blessed are they that stumble" (2), and this would fit with our suggestion made on 5:6 that the 'happy' people are those who are spiritually weak but are accepted and forgiven. However, the reference may be to the priesthood, with whom God made a covenant of peace, that they might bring Israel to peace with Him (Num. 25:12; Mal. 2:6). Just as the Lord encouraged the disciples to see themselves as Moses, so He inspires them with the thought that they, the nothing special, secular Jews, could and would take over the work of the

priesthood. Rabbi Hillel “exhorted his students to become disciples of Aaron, ‘peacelovers and peacemakers’ (mAb1:12)” (3).

5:10 *Persecute*- ‘to drive away’ (s.w. Mt. 1:23; 23:34), maybe carrying the idea of excommunication. Being thrown out of the synagogue was a major and frequent occurrence for many who came to Jesus. There are Old Testament connections between persecution and suffering for sin (Dt. 30:1-7), so the Lord could also have in view, as often in the Beatitudes, that He is offering blessing and happiness for the messed up sinners who are suffering in this life for their sins.

5:11 Paul's extraordinary ability to rejoice in his trials seems to have been rooted in his sustained reflection upon Mt. 5:11,12: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you... rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward... for so persecuted they the prophets" . These words are alluded to in at least 5 verses in his epistles. Again seeking to challenge the prevailing views of the Jewish leadership, the Lord invited His humble fishermen-followers to see themselves as the great prophets of old being persecuted by a wicked Israel (Mt. 5:11).

*Revile*- Quoted by Peter in 1 Pet. 4:14 where he says that we are blessed / happy if we are reviled for the sake of Christ's Name. Verses 10 and 11 seem to imply that persecution, slander and serious opposition is inevitable for all who will follow Christ. Yet when these things happen, we seem to be shocked and surprised.

5:12- see on 5:7.

*Revile*- When Corinth reviled him (2 Cor. 7:4), Paul saw this as being reviled and persecuted after the pattern of Mt. 5:12.

*Persecute*- The language of persecution is also rooted very much in the language and experience of the prophets. The similar language in Mk. 13:8-11 and Lk. 21:12-18 suggests the same. Again, just as the Lord has challenged his secular, nothing-special followers to see themselves as Moses, now He invites them to see themselves as the prophets. And so a theme develops in the Sermon- that He is seeking to place the mantle of Moses, David and the prophets upon ordinary, sinful members of spiritual society, seeking to show them their huge potential significance in God's program. And that impression must come home to us too in our situations, no longer considering that spiritual heroics and work for God are somehow for 'the others', the leaders.

5:13 *The salt of the earth*- Salt inevitably affects, by reason of *what it is*, whatever is next to it. We are lights in a dark world. Lights give light. If the salt doesn't have the influence of salt, it is thrown away. Our poor record of preaching by personal contact is very worrying when seen in this light. We have hidden behind leaflets and press adverts and giving money.

But if we aren't the salt, if we don't show *our* light in our little world; are we in fact the salt or the light of the earth? This unconscious spirituality, this natural witnessing, is the essential reflection of our experience of the Lord Jesus. He didn't say 'Do good works so that men may see the light'. He said "*let your light shine*" - and *then* men will see your good works and glorify the Father.

One characteristic of salt is that it creates thirst. We are mistaken if we assume that all those people out there are just waiting for us to come to them with a series of true doctrinal propositions. Virtually nobody is seriously interested- until they meet you and me. We need to create some sort of realization of need in those we mix with. Through our examples and through the way we make our initial approaches to them, we need to plug in to that basic human hunger for their creator. Plenty of other religions do just this- and we ought to be far more 'in there' than many of us are. The language seems to suggest that unless we are not influencing others, then we will be condemned. As in 4:19, the Lord seems to be teaching that some form of outgoing effect upon others, if not evangelism, is part and parcel of following Him. The parable of the light under the bucket in 5:15 teaches the same.

We *are* the salt of the earth. The Lord doesn't say that we ought to be the salt of the earth, or should try to be. Salt with no flavour or influence is pointless, worthless, untrue to what it is intended to be, displeasing to its user, fit only to be thrown out; and so are we, if we fail to witness to others (Lk. 14:35). Likewise, we *are* the light of the world. By the very nature of who we are as in Christ, we are to influence the world around us. We don't just hold the light in our hands; *we* are the light, our whole being, every moment we live. Preaching the light is not therefore something which we occasionally do. Sodium chloride (salt) is inert, meaning it remains unchanged by processes acting upon it and retains its characteristics through whatever. In the same way as the believer is the city set on a hill which cannot be hid, the man who builds on rock, the good tree that must bring forth good fruit, so the Lord seems to be saying again that the essential direction of a believer's life is clear. God sees as either His people or not, and there is no grey area. We don't drop in and out of fellowship with Him. And this should be a comfort to us. We are His. Any salt that lost its saltiness was not true salt, but some imitation (at the time, gypsum was sold by rogue salt traders as salt) or just something which appeared like salt- there is some 'salt' from the Dead Sea area which may have been in the Lord's mind. But the point was, that it was not true salt from the start. The covenant of salt was given to Aaron (Num. 18:19)- so yet again, the Lord is encouraging those secular men to see themselves as a new priesthood.

The counter-culture of which Jesus is Lord is indeed radical. The Sermon on the Mount, and so much of Jesus' later teaching, revolves around "us" [His people] acting one way whilst the world acts in another. We are to love all men, whereas the world loves only its friends; we are to pray meaningfully, whilst the Gentile world merely heap up empty phrases; we are to seek the things of God's Kingdom, whilst the world seeks only for material things. Human values are radically reversed in Christ. The humble are exalted and the proud debased; the first are put last, the servant made the greatest. But Jesus also contrasts His followers not only with

"the Gentiles" but with the contemporary religious people- the 'scribes and Pharisees'. Thus we are to be radically different both from the nominal church, and the secular world in general. Repeatedly Jesus speaks of "they" and "you"; and yet He also spoke of the handful of Palestinian peasants who really grasped His teaching as being the salt of the earth [Israel?] and the light of the [whole Gentile] world. It was their separateness from the world that was to be a part of the world's salvation. So Jesus was certainly not teaching a bunker mentality, an island existence, but rather a reaching out into the world of others for their salvation. The true radicalism is the radicalism of love- love lived out in ordinary life. Whether we strive for absolute truthfulness, what place we seek at a feast, the struggle to grant real and total forgiveness- this is the radicalism of love.

The beatitudes were spoken generally of all believers, but "You are the salt of the earth" was spoken specifically to the disciples. We can understand the 'earth' as the land- of Israel. The Lord pinned His hopes for the whole land of Israel on that band of rather unlikely men, most of them secular, non-religious Jews. It was in their power to change and prepare the whole land for Him. The very metaphor of salt was well chosen- for salt was cheap and common. It was by their very earthliness and humanity that their mission was to succeed, just as was the case for the Lord Himself.

*Wherewith shall it be salted?*- The idea could be that if we are not salt for the earth, preparing people to be acceptable sacrifices to God, then there is no plan B. It all depends upon us. And if we don't do that work, then we shall be rejected. Note how Paul speaks of the conversion of people as the offering up in sacrifice of the Gentiles (Rom. 15:16).

*Good*- The idea is of being able, to have possibility. If we will not use our potential for good, then we will be rejected, because we have no possibilities for use. It's only when we wilfully lose our potential for good that we really are of no use. Lk. 14:34 carries the same idea- if salt loses savour, what then can be used for seasoning ["wherewith shall it be salted"]? The idea is surely that if salt cannot be used for making salty- then it can be used for nothing, it has no practical use.

*Cast out*- The same phrase is used about the rejection of the wicked at the last day (Mt. 13:48; Jn. 15:6). The 'treading underfoot by men' would then refer to the faithful having some part to play in the condemnation of the wicked. The idiom may mean that they will be despised by them. Or there could be a literal element to it (Mal. 4:3 "the wicked shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in that day"). It is not for us to thus judge others *now* because we are to do so *then*.

5:14 *A city set on a hill*- The reference is surely to Jerusalem, which was known as the city set on a hill (4). The connection between this city and "the light of the world" is clearly drawing from Old Testament descriptions of Jerusalem being a light to which the true Israel would rally and the Gentile world would come for enlightenment about the true God (Ps.

132:17 cp. 1 Kings 11:34-36; Is. 2:2; 60:1; 66:20). Jerusalem was the classic external symbol of Israel and Judaism- and the Lord is saying that His largely non-religious, secular Jewish disciples were to be the true Zion for the enlightenment of both Israel and the world. This is similar to His invitation for them to see themselves as Moses, who alone "saw God", and sharing in the persecutions of the prophets. This high calling echoes down to us- we who like to think that we are not amongst God's great heroes, and who prefer to leave the dramatic acts of faith to our leaders and high profile members. But the calling is to each of us, to be of no less significance than them, not to hide behind the grand religious symbols of faith such as the temple and the city of Jerusalem- but to be those things in daily life. Judaism understood the Levitical priesthood as the light of the Jewish and Gentile worlds. The Testament of Levi 14:3 claimed of the priesthood: "For as the heaven is purer in the Lord's sight than the earth, so also be ye, the lights of Israel, (purer) than all the Gentiles [or in another manuscript "ye who are the lights of Israel, shall be as the sun and moon"]". And yet as so often in the Sermon, the Lord applies the language of priesthood to his secular, spiritually poor listeners.

*Be hid-* Again there appears the idea that if we hide who we are from others, then we are not really Christian. A city on a hill cannot possibly be covered. It is totally public. There must be an element about our discipleship which is likewise absolutely open and obvious to the world. When the Lord returns, it would be strange indeed if our neighbours were shocked to know that we were actually one of His people. The same word is used about the man who 'hid' the talent of the Gospel (Mt. 25:25). The relevance of this emphasis in the first century world was that it was apparently easier to merely quietly assent to Christian teaching, rather than come out in the open about it. The same word is used of how Joseph of Arimathea 'secretly', hiddenly, believed, for fear of the Jews (Jn. 19:38). But in the end, he 'came out', as we all are lead to do by providential circumstance and our own growing conviction of Christ.

*All* those who preach Him are like a city that cannot be hidden (Mt. 5:14); just as He likewise "could not be hid" in His preaching (Lk. 7:24). He was the light of the world, and so are we. In the work of witness, we find ourselves especially united to Him. We are Him to this world, and in a sense, He only shines in this world through us. Witnessing is in a sense for our benefit. Perhaps in answer to the unspoken question 'How can we avoid losing our saltiness?', the Lord replied by saying that a city set on a hill cannot be hid (Mt. 5:14). He meant that the open exhibition of the Truth by us will help us in the life of personal obedience to Him. The city set on a hill is specifically spoken as being Nazareth, where the Lord had grown up (Lk. 4:29). Jesus must've seen the town from the distance and thought out His teaching over the years before He now publically stated it.

5:15 *Light-* The Lord speaks of how we are the light of the world, giving light to the world in the same way as "they" light a lamp. Who are the "they"? The point has been made that to 1st century Palestinian ears, the answer was obvious: Women. Because lighting the lamps was a typical female duty, which men were not usually involved in. Could it not be that the Lord Jesus even *especially* envisaged women as His witnesses? Did He here have in mind how a

great company of women would be the first to share the news that the light of the world had risen?

*The candlestick* - The article refers to the specific candlestick, and to Jewish minds this would surely have referred to the candlestick in the Holy Place (s.w. Heb. 9:2). This continues the theme of the Lord teaching a new form of Judaism, for His sermon on the mount is full of allusions to previous Mosaic practice, but redefining it. The implication of :16 is that ordinary men are present in the Holy Place too, who will see our light. Or it could be that Jesus has in mind how it was the priests who alone entered the Holy Place- and He is saying that the light from those who followed Him would illuminate the Jewish priesthood. The light of the candlestick is both the believer (Mt. 5:15) and the Gospel itself (Mk. 4:21). We are to be the Gospel. We must burn as a candle now, in shedding forth the light, or we will be burnt at the judgment (Mt. 5:15 and Jn. 15:6 use the same words). This is but one of many examples of the logic of endurance; we must burn anyway, so why not do it for the Lord's sake and reap the reward.

The story of the candle that was put under a bucket brings out an issue related to that of the desire to root up the tares: the candle was put there (presumably) on account of an almost paranoid fear that the wind would blow it out; but this over-protection of the lamp in itself caused the light to go out (Mt. 5:15). Time and again, preaching the light, holding up the beacon of the word of Christ's cross, has been impeded or stifled in the name of preserving the truth, strengthening what remains (words taken out of context). And because of this lack of witness, this lack of holding out the light to others, the fire of Christ has waxed dim amongst us. This ties in to the theme that preaching is not just commanded as a publicity exercise for Almighty God; He doesn't need us to do that for Him. It is commanded for the benefit of the preacher more than those preached to. To put a candle under a bucket or bed seems senseless; yet this is how senseless and inappropriate it is to hold back preaching for the sake of defending the Faith. Indeed to put it under a bed (Mk. 4:21) and then go to sleep (candles are normally only lit at night) is likely to destroy the person who does it, to burn them while they are asleep. All who have the light but don't preach it (in whatever form) are likely to suffer the same; notice how the Lord (by implication) links night time and sleepiness with an apathy in preaching. Evidently the Lord foresaw the attitude that has surfaced amongst His people: 'We must concentrate on keeping the Truth, new converts are often problematic, too much energy goes to preaching rather than building up ourselves in the faith'. Probably the resistance to preaching to the Gentiles in the first century used similar reasoning. The Lord may have had in mind a Talmud entry (*Shabbat* 107a) which permitted the covering of a lamp with a bowl on the Sabbath if it was done in order to stop the entire house catching fire. He is arguing that such a fear based attitude, fearful of possible consequence if we share the light, will result in the light going out. And that lesson needs to be learnt time and again.

5:16 *Before men*- These are those "in the house[hold]" (:15), "those who enter" (Lk. 8:16; 11:33). The general public does not seem to glorify God because of good works. 2 Cor. 9:2 seems to understand the verse as meaning that we give light and opportunity for praise to other believers. Paul writes of how the generous commitments of the Corinthian ecclesias had "inspired very many" to generosity (2 Cor. 9:2). And we too, in our abundant responses to God's super-abundant grace, will inspire each other likewise. I don't mean, of course, in the proud manner of many charity donors, trying to outshine each other before the public's gaze by their 'generosity'. I mean that in the graces of forgiveness, kindness in a myriad modest ways, that we see performed by others, we will find *our* motivation to do likewise. For rightly-performed good works are a light to the world; perhaps it is their very modesty which makes them "*shine* before men". So in this sense we will perceive others' acts of grace and be inspired by them, no matter how discreetly and modestly done they are. For they inevitably shine in a way that gives light to all who are in the (ecclesial) house, so that they too glorify the Father (Mt. 5:16).

It could be that the "men" who glorify God in Heaven are the Angels- the same "men" who lit our candle in the first place (:15). "Men" in the parables who do the 'gathering' of our fruits (Jn. 15:6; Mt. 7:16) represent Angels, who are the ones who will actually do the gathering at the last day (Mt. 13:41; 24:31). This seems to make most sense, and avoids the idea of our doing good works specifically in order to impress men. And men do not glorify God just because they see our good works. But Angels, who lit our candle in the first place, notice how our light is shining out to others "in the house", and glorify God in Heaven ["*is* in Heaven" is unjustified- the idea is that they glorify the Father, in Heaven]. In this interpretation, the "men" are different to those who are "in the house".

5:17 *Fulfill*- The idea that the Lord Jesus ended the Law of Moses on the cross needs some reflection. That statement only pushes the question back one stage further- how exactly did He 'end' the Law there? How did a man dying on a cross actually end the Law? The Lord Jesus, supremely in His death, was "the end of the law" (Rom. 10:4). But the Greek *telos* ["end"] is elsewhere translated "the goal" (1 Tim. 1:5 NIV). The character and person of the Lord Jesus at the end was the goal of the Mosaic law; those 613 commandments, if perfectly obeyed, were intended to give rise to a personality like that of the Lord Jesus. When He reached the climax of His personal development and spirituality, in the moment of His death, the Law was "fulfilled". Then, it was "accomplished" (:18), and *ginomai* there is usually used about events being accomplished; the supreme event in view is the cross. The Lord taught that He "came" in order to die; and yet He also "came" in order to "fulfil" the Law (Mt. 5:17). Mt. 5:17 = Gal. 5:14. Christ fulfilled the Law by His supreme love of His neighbour (us) as Himself. The Law of Moses was intended to create a perfect man- if it were to be totally obeyed. The Lord Jesus did this- and therefore there was no more need for the Law. Yet the Beatitudes were addressed to those who hungered to be righteous, and who were spiritually poor, having broken God's laws. It was therefore in this context that the Lord Jesus sets before those very people the ultimate good news- that He has come determined to succeed in perfect obedience to the Law, and thus fulfilling it, He would remove its binding

nature upon others. Hence the Law was added *until* the Seed should come (Gal. 3:19). This conclusion (in broad terms) was also arrived at by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (5). The Lord's total obedience and fulfilling of the Law is therefore further good news for we who have failed both historically and in present life to keep it.

5:18 *Jot... tittle*- Vine comments: "Jot is for jod, the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Tittle is the little bend or point which serves to distinguish certain Hebrew letters of similar appearance. Jewish tradition mentions the letter jod as being irremovable; adding that, if all men in the world were gathered to abolish the least letter in the law, they would not succeed. The guilt of changing those little hooks which distinguish between certain Hebrew letters is declared to be so great that, if such a thing were done, the world would be destroyed".

5:19 *These least commandments*- See on 'jot and tittle' (:18). Note the connection between breaking "these least commandments" and being "least in the Kingdom". The least in the Kingdom will therefore be those who didn't consider the small things worthy of their attention. But the principle is that by our attitude to that which is "least" we show our appropriacy to receive that which is great (Lk. 16:10 s.w.).

*And taught* - The Lord explained that "the least in the Kingdom of Heaven" would have broken "the least" commandments, and would have taught men so (Mt. 5:19); and yet "the least in the Kingdom" was a phrase He elsewhere used about those who would actually be in the Kingdom (Mt. 11:11; 25:40 "the least of these my brothers"). Here surely is His desire to save, and His gracious overlooking of intellectual failure, human misunderstanding, and dogmatism in that misunderstanding ("teaching men so"). The idea of being called / named / pronounced great or least in the Kingdom suggests differing degrees of reward distributed at judgment day. The idea of being called / named at the day of judgment has just been used in Mt. 5:9 (s.w.). There is thus the possible implication that some who will be accepted by the Lord who even at their acceptance at the judgment have wrong attitudes towards their brethren. Thus before the Lord of the harvest, those who thought they had worked hardest complained that those they thought had done less, were still getting a penny. They were rebuked, but they still had their penny (cp. salvation; Mt. 20:11). The subsequent comment that the first shall be last might imply that they will be in the Kingdom, but in the least place. Likewise the brother who takes the highest place in the ecclesia will be made with shame to take the lower place (Lk. 14:9). Or the bitter elder brother, angry at the Father's gracious enthusiasm for the worthless brother, is addressed by the Father (God) in language which is relevant to the Lord Jesus: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine" (Lk. 15:30). These sentiments are elsewhere expressed about the Lord Jesus. Is the implication that bitter elder brother is still in Christ and accepted in Him, even though his attitude to his brother is not what it should be? The least in the Kingdom will be those who break commandments *and teach men so* (Mt. 5:19); but the least in the Kingdom will be counted greater than John the Baptist was in this life (Mt. 11:11). The simple message is that there

will be some in the Kingdom who simply weren't very obedient in this their day of probation. Admittedly, these details are capable of other interpretations. But bear these points in mind, especially if you ever struggle with the apparent harshness of some Christians you may meet.

*Called least-* The least in the Kingdom will be those who break commandments *and teach men so* (Mt. 5:19); but the least in the Kingdom will be counted greater than John the Baptist was in this life (Mt. 11:11). The simple message is that there will be some in the Kingdom who simply weren't very obedient in this their day of probation. Admittedly, these details are capable of other interpretations. But bear these points in mind, especially if you ever struggle with the apparent harshness of some Christians you may meet.

*Called great-* It is Jesus Himself who shall be called great (the same two words used in Lk. 1:32 "He shall be *great* and shall be *called* the Son of the Highest"). The one who would do and teach supremely would be Jesus. Here, as so often, the Lord makes an oblique reference to Himself (as in mentioning that some seed would bring forth one hundred fold). The fact we teach others to do righteousness will be a factor in our acceptance (Mt. 5:19); although not the only one. Again we see the implication that we are to somehow teach others, to engage with others, in order to be acceptable.

5:20 *Exceed-* The Lord asks us to *exceed* the "righteousness" of the Pharisees (Mt. 5:20). By "righteousness" he refers to their charity, for which they were well known. In addition to tithing ten percent of absolutely everything, they gave a fifth of their income to charity such as widows, orphans, newly-wedded couples etc. In addition they made anonymous gifts in a "quiet room" of the Temple. How does our giving compare to that? And the Lord challenges us that unless we *exceed* that, "ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven". Radical, challenging words- that are hard to re-interpret or get around. And yet surely the answer is that super-abounding (AV 'exceeding') righteousness is only attainable by being justified / counted righteous in Christ. The Lord's challenging statement was surely in order to lead us to the same conclusions reached in Romans 1-8 about being counted righteous when we have no righteousness of our own. For to super-abundantly exceed the technical, points-scoring righteousness of the Pharisees was well-nigh impossible.

*Enter the Kingdom-* A very common idea in the Lord's teaching. But He understood people to be 'entering' the Kingdom right now ("them that are entering", Mt. 23:13). In the same way as judgment is ongoing now, so is condemnation and entry into the Kingdom.