



# Mt Lebanon Evangelical Presbyterian Church

*Making and Growing Followers of Jesus*

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January 22, 2025

Greetings in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

I hope you are all staying warm in this frigid weather! I think we have been spoiled with the last couple of mild winters, but this one reminds us what a Pittsburgh winter really is. Of course, I have several friends in Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, and the Carolinas who are also discovering what a Pittsburgh winter feels like! Remind yourself that at least we have snowplows!

As we continue our sermon series on Matthew, we are going to spend the next four weeks looking at the Sermon on the Mount. If you picked up a study guide, you'll see that we will be spending two weeks each on chapters 4 and 5. This passage is so rich, we could probably spend months on it without plumbing the depths that it has to offer!

St. Augustine once wrote, "If anyone will piously and soberly consider the sermon which our Lord Jesus Christ spoke on the mount, as we read it in the Gospel according to Matthew, I think that he will find in it, so far as regards the highest morals, a perfect standard of the Christian life." I fully agree—this is the perfect summary of the life we should aspire to lead. But as we hold up this mirror to our lives, we almost always will find ourselves falling far short of this perfect standard. If these chapters don't make you squirm, are you really being honest with yourself? It can be rough stuff! I feel convicted at every turn.

One of my former students texted me recently to ask how we handle this. "How are we supposed to admit that we are not perfect beings and yet strive for perfection?" she asked. I reassured her that we do not have to be perfect to be accepted by God – it is the grace of Jesus purchased for us by His death on the cross that allows us to be welcomed into God's family. The theological word for that is justification – "just-as-if-I'd" never sinned. Justification is coupled with sanctification. The word Sanctus means holy, so sanctification is the process of becoming or being made holy. We are all in process. None of us hits perfection until heaven, but we can grow in our likeness to Christ over time. This is not to make us more loved or more worthy of love. It's to make us more like Christ so we can represent Him to the world.

The mirror of the Sermon on the Mount shows us all those places where we need to grow. "Love your enemies..." except THAT GUY! "Don't worry about tomorrow..." but what about all the things I need to do?! Each time God highlights for us a place we have fallen short, He offers us a chance to confess and be cleansed and confess and be cleansed. And over time with all the scrubbing and washing, we as individuals and we as a community draw closer to the Lord and begin to radiate Christ's light to the world.

The Sermon on the Mount is tough, but it is vital for the church today. Will we become as bitter and angry as the world around us, or will we learn to rejoice when we are persecuted, care for the poor, and take the log out of our own eye? As you prepare your hearts for worship this Sunday, set aside 15-20 minutes and read through Matthew 5-7. What stands out to you? What especially do you feel like you need to be healed of? What is one area you want to improve in? Invite the Lord into your reflection and see how He wants to gently lead you along this path to holiness.

Blessings,  
Pastor Carolyn