

Freedom in Christ

The Sermon on the Mount - for Disciples

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Text: Matthew 6

(where not indicated otherwise, biblical texts are taken from the English Standard Version)

1. The Sermon on the Mount is for Disciples

The longer version of Jesus' famous "Sermon on the Mount" is found in Matthew 5-7, the shorter one in Luke 6:20-49. Whom did Jesus address? In Matthew 5:1-2, we read:

¹ Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: ...

This is Matthew's introduction to the Sermon on the Mount. Clearly, it addresses Jesus' disciples, not the multitudes. Jesus starts out with eight "beatitudes". All of these blessings are formulated in a like manner, "Blessed are the..., for"; they are bracketed by the refrain "theirs is the kingdom of heaven" occurring in the first and the eighth of these astonishing sayings in verses 3-10:

³ Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ...

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus underlines the fact that these blessings apply specifically to his disciples by addressing them directly in the subsequent verses 11-12:

¹¹ Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Thus, the addressees are those who have decided to follow Jesus, even though this might entail their being reviled, persecuted and slandered.



Mount of beatitudes, looking southwest onto the Lake of Gennesareth



Mount of beatitudes, looking southeast onto the Lake of Gennesareth

Provocatively, Jesus concludes with "so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Does he really compare his weak disciples with the prophets? And Jesus has an extremely high regard for the Old Testament prophets! For him, their word, without restrictions, is God's word having absolute authority. What, then, is the point of the comparison?

To begin with, his disciples here are the twelve whom he chose, in order to make them "fishers of men", apostles or ambassadors. Jesus is looking ahead to the composition of the New Testament, which is destined to have the same divine authority as the Old Testament. Some of the apostles and of their immediate coworkers will write these new texts. In this

way, Jesus already points forward to the new covenant, which is going to replace the old one.

Of course, the whole crowds, as well, could listen to the Sermon on the Mount. And we read at its conclusion (Matthew 7:28-29):

²⁸ And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, ²⁹ for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

Many in this crowd may have become disciples, too, but before that, the essence of Jesus' message was hidden for them. And for a genuine understanding, they, like the first disciples, had to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit sent down at Pentecost, after Jesus' resurrection. Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a theologian – Jesus calls him "the teacher of Israel" (John 3:10) –, realized that Jesus had come from God. Yet, restricting this compliment, Jesus had to tell even him (John 3:3):

Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

2. The Function of the Law for Israel

The Law of Moses was an absolute standard for Israel. But the new covenant, which came into effect on Pentecost, is more comprehensive, making the Law obsolete (Hebrews 8:13), as Paul told the Christians in Romans 6:14:

... you are not under law but under grace.

This is also said in Hebrews 8:13:

In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Thus, with the new covenant, the old one has become obsolete and ready to vanish away. Why then does Jesus place such an astonishingly large importance on the Old Testament Law? Introducing his exposition of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount, he says in Matthew 5:17-19:

¹⁷ Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹

Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

We find the solution of this apparent contradiction in what follows directly, in verse 20:

²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

This is not a moderation, but a tightening up of the force of the Law! So how should this solve the problem?

The Law has been given by God. It therefore has an absolute authority. We have read that Jesus has come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets – that is, all of the Old Testament (verse 17). The crucial point is that *he* fulfills it, not *we*. Wherefore then must our righteousness exceed that of the Pharisees by far? They paid extremely close attention to fulfilling the Law, it is true, but even this was absolutely insufficient, as Paul emphasizes in Romans 3:10-12:



Sinai, Hotel Mubarak, looking southeast towards Mount Sinai (behind the prominent massif)



Evening on the summit of Mount Sinai, looking north

¹⁰ ... as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

He is quoting Psalm 14:1-3. And Isaiah (in 64:6) confesses in like manner:

We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

But were Jesus' disciples – or are we today, for that matter – any abler or more righteous than the Pharisees? No. Why then has the Law been given at all, if one is unable to fulfill it anyhow? This inability applies to all humans, globally, as Paul says in Romans 3:20 – at the same time leading us a step further towards the solution of the problem:

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.



Sunset on the summit of Mount Sinai

How can knowledge of sin lead to fulfillment of the Law, even to a righteousness far surpassing even that of those most extremely zealous for the Law? In Matthew 5, Jesus talks about the fulfillment of the Law in four examples: they deal with murder (21-26), adultery (27-32), swearing (33-37), and retribution (38-48). Each time he first says "You have heard that it was said to those of old:...", and then continues "But I say to you:..." (verses 22, 28, 34, 39), transferring the sin from the outward act to the thought inside the heart. In biblical parlance, the heart does not designate any feelings, as we usually do today, but a person's primary attitude, thinking and will. The sin is in the heart before it leads to the deed. We may see this as a tightening up of the force of the Law, but it is what God had in mind with it from the outset.

It is the Holy Spirit who speaks to a person's conscience, making them conscious of harboring sin in their hearts. But humans are free to close their consciences against the Holy Spirit's gentle exhortation. To those who have come to Jesus, however, becoming his disciples, the Holy Spirit has been given into their hearts "in residence", and so they do no longer systematically harden their consciences against him.

Then, in Matthew 6, Jesus continues with three examples dealing with one's inner motivation when fulfilling the three religious activities held by the Pharisees to be the most important ones: almsgiving (1-4), prayer (5-15), and fasting (16-18). Each time, Jesus says that it should not be done publicly, as the hypocrites do, in order to be seen by the people: "they have received their reward" (verses 2, 5, 16) – where "received" is business language for having received an expected payment in full. On the contrary, it should be done in secret, "and your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (verses 4, 6, 18). The only acceptable motivation is the disciples' love towards God, their heavenly Father, who has already accepted them in grace.

Thus, the Law leads to knowledge and personal acknowledgment of sin, and thereby to the possibility of receiving forgiveness.

3. The Kingdom of Heaven as God's Objective

It is God's aim to bring humans into the kingdom of heaven, into eternal glory with himself. But such as we are, we would not be in any position to support God's radiant presence at all, because it is a "consuming fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29). We would burn up immediately, like a withered leaf (Isaiah 64:5) in fire. In Matthews 5:48 – immediately preceding the 6th chapter which we are considering here – Jesus says:

You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

In similar ways, God had said it many times in the Law and the Prophets, e.g. in Leviticus 19:2:

Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

How could we ever be perfect and holy?! *We cannot*. Only Jesus, God's Son, is perfect and holy. Only *in Christ* can we be perfect, just and holy, because *he* is. When we are *in Christ*, God sees *him* and his righteousness, when he is looking at us.

But I can only be in him if I have decided to humble myself before him, accepting his substitutionary sacrifice for myself personally by faith. In Gethsemane, Jesus "offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears," (Hebrews 5:7), in order to be able to take my guilt upon himself. He was ready to descend into the terrible reality of being forsaken by God, his Father. Being forsaken by God was the most dreadful suffering for him, not death and physical suffering in itself. If I accept the free gift of this ransom by his substitutionary sacrifice for myself, I am born again through the Holy Spirit whom he gives into my heart, and so I am placed into Christ and justified in him.



Jerusalem, very ancient olive trees in Gethsemane

In various parables, Jesus has intimated what happens then. In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the latter recognized himself as a sinner and was justified (Luke 18:10-14). The lost son in the parable returned to his father repenting (Luke 15:11-32). But even "while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him" (verse 20). Peter says (in 2 Peter 3:9) that God does ...

... not [wish] that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

And Paul says in Colossians 1:13:

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son ...

This is God's objective for everyone who is willing to turn to Jesus.

But God doesn't force anyone to believe, but always respects the personal freedom he has given all humans.

Repeatedly, Jesus has pointed out to his disciples that, despite all distress and danger connected with it, their lives of following him need not be a heavy load at all, e.g. in Matthew 11:28-30:

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

The life of faith can have blessedness and freedom now already. Seen spiritually, the kingdom of God is here among us already (Luke 17:21). In his teaching about prayer (Matthew 6:6-15), Jesus says, among other things (verses 7-8):

⁷ And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

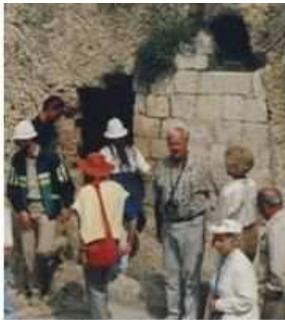
Equally liberating is a similar trust in God's love with respect to our daily needs, like food (verses 11, 26-27) and clothing (verses 28-30), but also forgiveness (verse 12), keeping and deliverance "from the evil one" (or "from evil", both translations being possible in verse 13):

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread, ¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from *[the] evil [one]*. ...

²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

4. God's Education Method for Humanity

God has created humans as beings capable of a genuine, personal relationship of love towards him. This results in sort of a dilemma for God, if one may say so: on the one hand, no creature can be perfect and therefore capable of supporting God's presence, but on the other hand, genuine love presupposes genuine freedom. Therefore it was clear from the outset that many humans will be lost,



**Jerusalem, Garden Tomb
(stone track for
rolling door stone
in front of entrance)**

despite God's love is as absolute as his omnipotence. It is true that in the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, God takes all human guilt upon himself. Thus, in principle, everyone could be saved. But not even omnipotence can remove a logical impossibility. Enforced love is a contradiction in itself: love cannot exist without freedom. A puppet or robot or computer cannot love.

Yet God wants nevertheless to bring salvation to the largest possible number of humans. Thus he has decreed for humanity an educational path across the millennia. This path led through a series of divine covenants with humans. In every stage, he elected a part of humanity for the next step. In this way, he prepared the way for the incarnation of his Son.

He established covenants with Adam, with Noah, with Abraham, with Isaac, with Jacob, with the people of Israel at the Sinai, with Levi, with Pinhas (Aaron's grandson), with Israel at the Jordan, with David – and last of all the new covenant in the blood of the cross of Jesus. This new covenant is no longer restricted to a part of humanity only, but was established for all who accept his offer of reconciliation, being born again in the process.

In the New Testament, the Greek word *diathêkê* is used for "covenant"; it also means "Testament". A covenant of God is guaranteed on God's side, but it can be despised and forsaken on the human side. Everything in the Old and New Testaments has its significance in the light of God's covenant with humans, teaching them to see how, despite their being sinners, they have a possibility of coming into his kingdom of heaven. In Old Testament times, God established his covenant with a selected part of humanity, but everyone in the group selected had the freedom to forsake the covenant. In New Testament times – and today, God offers all humans his new covenant, but everyone has the freedom to despise it, remaining outside.

Education also implies reliable information about the material to be taught, i.e. textbooks, or in the case of divine education the reliable Word of God in the entire biblical text. In the course of more than a thousand years, the books of the Old Testament were written (some texts date from even earlier times). And after the work of salvation was finished, the New Testament books were completed within a few dozen years.

Before the cross, God prepared the stage for the Redeemer with the people of Israel – after the cross, the path was free for all peoples.

One can only educate children by talking to them in a way that they can understand. Similarly, biblical texts must be formulated in such a way that the original addressees could understand them correctly.

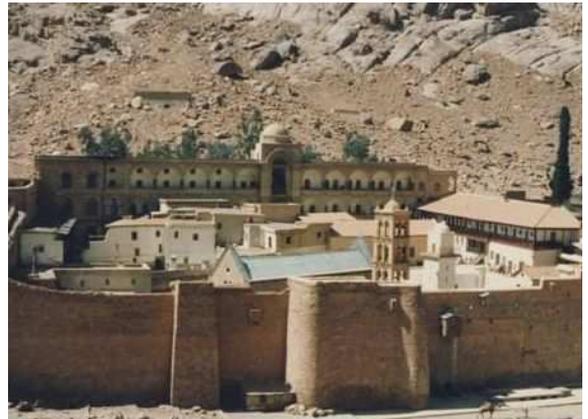


**Jerusalem, hill of Golgotha
(the garden tomb is to the lower left, not shown here)**

When interpreting the Word, we must therefore always take into consideration the language, environment, and culture of the original recipients. In this sense, we may assume that God accommodated his words to the limited knowledge of the first hearers and readers of a given message.

5. Does God accommodate himself to our errors?

There are interpreters who believe that God accommodated himself to the ancient cultural environment of the biblical authors in *everything* except the main theological points he wanted to convey – meaning that we have to search for the theological golden needles in a mythological haystack. In non-theological respects, God is supposed to have accepted the introduction of errors and contradictions into the biblical texts, even ethical deficiencies like polygamy, divorce, and slavery.



Sinai, Convent of Catharine at the foot of Mount Sinai, building at the rear is the library where the Codex Sinaiticus was found, one of the most ancient copies of the Torah, the Law of Moses

Such views have been spreading even among those who believe in Jesus as the Son of God, having personally accepted him as their own Savior. But that overreaching accommodationism is hardly an appropriate description of the kind of accommodation God certainly uses. It is possible to give even a toddler an appropriate explanation about where babies come from, without dealing with any stork drivel. One can help children appreciate the Lord Jesus, without reaching for a helping of legends, apocrypha, or other religious fairytales.

Natural languages have appreciable flexibility. Almost any fact or event can be expressed in multiple ways. One or more of them may be both easily understandable yet in concordance with reality. A description may be incomplete, but true as far as it goes. God can guide a prophet or apostle to formulate his message in this sense. Like anyone knowing his language, the prophet would often see different ways of expressing a divinely inspired idea. Perhaps he himself does not know which of these variants would reflect a false world view of his cultural environment, but God knows, and he can gently guide the prophet's thinking and prevent his using the wrong expression. Although therefore the prophet used the language and culture of his environment, he could be led to choose a variant concurring with reality. Sometimes different interpretations of a given expression may be linguistically possible, yet one of them may correspond to an ancient error, while the other one may concord with facts learned only recently. It may therefore be quite legitimate to replace a traditional interpretation with a different one if newer knowledge has been gained, e.g. in the natural sciences.

Prophetic utterances may have more than a single fulfillment. This concept is quite biblical. For messianic prophecies, whose scope was only recognized once they were fulfilled, this is even the normal case. We read in 1 Peter 1:10-12:

¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, ¹¹ inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

If the New Testament interpretations of messianic prophecies are compared to the Old Testament texts quoted, one usually sees that the prophet gave his ancient hearers a message they could readily apply to their own situation, but that the text also points to a far future. In these cases, both interpretations are correct, even though they are completely different.



Jericho, Tel es-Sultan: residues of a tower from the 7th or 8th millennium BC, thus at least about 2000 years before Adam

God's accommodation to the language, culture, and environment of his prophets may be profound, but it never goes so far as to let mistaken or misleading statements get into his Word. We also have to take note of the fact that God has given his Word not only for the original hearers, but for readers of all times and all cultures, for God's objective of salvation is global.

It is therefore not only a legitimate endeavor, but a necessary one, to look for harmony among different biblical texts - but also between these and reality, even reality unknown to the human author of the text. We may confidently reject as false any interpretation of the original texts implying unambiguous mistakes defying harmonization.

6. Self-actualization Leads to Death

God's loving accommodation to the weakness of his human creatures is, however, often misunderstood. Why? They transmogrified God into an innocuous old man with a beard who permits anything. Because some are still deeply entrenched in pagan thinking, they don't really take God and his Word seriously. Many also instinctively let themselves be determined by their sinful nature, remaining bogged down in selfishness. They keep revolving around themselves and their own wishes and desires.

In antiquity (or among modern pagan peoples), many conceived of God in terms of the gods of their own pagan culture, infested with the same sins as they are themselves. Later, atheism became fashionable, making matter an idol. And today, the homemade idol is called "self-actualization". Equally, "humanism" may sound like a very positive attitude, but its naive, unrealistic optimism made humanity the "measure of all things". It was rampant in German romanticism of 200 years ago. Despite its claim to being progressive, it is hopelessly dated.

People may always react either positively or negatively to God's loving offer. Besides the tax collector who prays sincerely, there is the hypocritical Pharisee who only wants to make his own mark (Luke 18:10-14). Besides the lost son returning to his father, there is the older son, filled with jealousy and selfishness (Luke 15:11-32). And besides the compassionate Samaritan, there is the priest and the Levite loving their own careers more than God (Luke 10:29-37). Jesus clearly shows in these parables, which one is justified and which one is not. Deciding what one wants to do about God is a decision about life and death. On the one hand, Jesus presents the narrow gate and the hard way leading to life, and on the other hand the wide gate and the easy way leading to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14). He even says that most people, by unbelief, choose their own destruction.

Today, pluralism is "in". Anything goes, no matter how unrealistic or esoteric, if only one believes in it sincerely. Many don't care about truth, or rather don't even believe any more that there is an absolute truth. Without being ashamed they say: "This may be true for you - but for me the reverse is true". Rather than caring for the truth (German *Wahrheit*, what is objectively true), one cares about perception (German *Wahrnehmung*, what one takes as being true). One just wants to feel good, enjoy, indulge.

In this way, not only faith in God and confidence in the bible are lost, but even a realistic confidence in science and technology, which are defining characteristics of our modern world, making possible all that enjoyment and luxury in the first place.

But Jesus doesn't tolerate any such dubiousness, any do-as-you-like in the heart attitude towards God, no "limping between two different opinions" (1 Kings 18:21). In this, he is absolutely intolerant. There is only an either-or, God or idols. In Matthew 6:24, Jesus says:

No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Here, "money" stands for "mammon" in the King James version. In itself, it has no negative connotation: it just is the Aramaic word for "possessions" (Jesus talked Aramaic). But in this context, mammon is placed in contrast with God; it therefore becomes an idol. Any possessions, including rightfully gained ones, become an idol if they are made determining in life. Materialism and self-centeredness or self-actualization is idolatry.

At the same time, Jesus explains why this is so, namely in the preceding verses, Matthew 6:22-23:

²² The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light,
²³ but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

What does this mean? Like a window, the eye brings light into the body, helping the body to find its way around. "Healthy" (the New International Version has "good", the King James Version "single") translates the Greek *haplous*, meaning "simple, intact, good, healthy, pure, transparent, honest, open". Jesus contrasts it with a "bad" eye ("evil" in the King James Version renders the Greek *ponêros* more accurately). This indicates that, again, it is a question of the heart attitude, which is called "the light in you". Either, "your whole body will be full of light", namely because the Holy Spirit has given you the new life, or else "the light in you is darkness", then "how great is the darkness!" - namely, if the evil heart closes itself against God's light. Only the born again find their way into the kingdom of heaven. Those who are slaves to self-actualization remain lost in darkness.

Therefore it is important to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). This is the only way leading to freedom, blessedness, and eternal life.

7. In Christ, the Law is Fulfilled

The Pharisees were zealous for the Old Testament Law, but their hypocrisy showed that their fervor was directed more towards their own public honor than towards God's glory and his kingdom. Jesus revealed their insincerity straight out - warning them of the consequences of failing to turn back. The only way leading to eternal life in God's blessed presence is the narrow way to the cross of Jesus, by confessing one's being lost.

The Law leads to this knowledge of being lost. Christ alone has really fulfilled the Law, and those attempting to fulfill the Law on their own must necessarily fail and remain lost. It is only *in Christ* that we can fulfill the Law. It is not possible to do it by one's own talents, goodness, effort etc. Justification by works (German *Werkgerechtigkeit*) - attempting to earn one's salvation, or at least to *contribute* to it, by doing good works - is an affront to the holy God. Such an attitude refuses to take seriously God's otherness: the Creator stands infinitely above any creature. It doesn't matter out of which ideological or self-centered source this attempt is flowing. Whether it be a Pharisaic, pagan, Catholic, evangelical, sectarian, esoteric, Hindu, Buddhist, humanist, atheistic or other justification by works, it remains justification by works and self-righteousness, which are an abomination to God.

One passage in Jesus' teaching about prayer is sometimes misunderstood in the sense of justification by works (Matthew 6:12-15):

¹² ... and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ...

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Does this mean that God forgives us only once we already have forgiven? No, certainly not! Paul says clearly which is the right sequence (Ephesians 4:32):

... forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

He repeats the same thing in Colossians 3:13. It is in this sense that Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:12-15 has to be interpreted, as well. In the parable of the wicked servant (Matthew 18:21-35), Jesus explains this subject more in-depth. He shows that unwillingness to forgive another person is incompatible with being a disciple; it proves that the servant concerned cannot be a true disciple, since he has not understood his own sinfulness. Similarly, in confirmation of this interpretation, Jesus warns in Matthew 12:31-32 that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven in eternity, for the only way one can be saved is to permit and accept the working of the Holy Spirit in one's conscience.

We must not take any biblical statements out of their context. And sometimes it is even the complete context of the entire bible only which gives us the key for finding a solution to interpretational difficulties.

How then are we to understand the good works which many biblical texts emphasize as being very important? Do they have anything to do with one's salvation, with one's justification before God? One cannot earn one's salvation by one's *own* righteousness. But God will ascribe *Jesus'* righteousness to those who are in him.

Good works come afterwards, being done out of thankfulness for the justification already obtained. And even then it is not our own good works, but those which God has prepared beforehand for us (Ephesians 2:10):

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Good works, therefore, are realized in three steps: first, by means of the new birth, God creates in us the new life as children of God, then he prepares the good works for us, and finally we are to do them – out of thankfulness and to his glory, as they are *his* works, not *ours*. They are the good fruit which the good tree would naturally bear, which becomes a blessing or a "reward" by making richer our joy in Christ. But in no manner, the good works in themselves are decisive for our salvation.

8. Let the one who desires take the water of life without price!

This wonderful promise of Revelation 22:17 may be taken as a summary of the freedom in Christ which Jesus presents in his Sermon on the Mount. It was addressed, at that time, to his twelve Jewish disciples and apostles, as the gospel had to be brought to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" first (Matthew 10:6). It was only after the fulfilment of Jesus' work on the cross that, in the new covenant, the way to eternal life was open for all humans.

The outrageous, impossible, maximal requirement for disciples, to be as perfect and holy as God the Almighty himself, turns out to be an unheard-of, comforting and liberating being led into the arms of the loving heavenly Father. The key to the solution of the unsolvable problem is the cross of Jesus Christ and the life in him after conversion and rebirth.

It is on this basis that the disciples now receive the commission to evangelize all peoples by proclaiming to them this wonderful salvation, which Christ has made available for all by his death on the cross. And again, it is his comforting and liberating presence, which enables them to fulfill this unheard-of, humanly impossible task (Matthew 28: 19-20):

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.



Israel, Nalbania north of Tel Aviv, Hotel King Solomon, sunset