

GOD'S CALL

Major themes in the Scriptures

Quality of being

Why is quality of being so important?

Reference: GDC-S17-002-Mw-R00-P2

(Originally spoken on 28 August 2011, edited on 10 September 2011)

Web site: <http://www.ajourneyinlife.org> and <http://www.ajourneyinlife.com>

This message is protected by copyright © 2011 Lim Liong. Permission is given to reproduce part (where the meaning is retained and the part is not quoted out of context) or all, of it, for personal use or for distribution, on condition that **no changes are made** and the message is **distributed free** of charge. Please do so prayerfully and discreetly.

Unless otherwise stated, Scripture quotations are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

The paragraphs above as well as this paragraph must be included when the message is reproduced so that others who reproduce it will be conscious of the conditions stated above.

The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject "Quality of being", the second message, as we seek to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures.

A short summary of today's message:

Moral quality of being is of very great importance in life and is primary in God's purpose in creation. It affects every aspect of our lives. We will seek the Lord to appreciate why it is so important.

Who is the greatest preacher who has ever lived? We all know it is the Lord Jesus. What is the greatest sermon that He has ever preached? Most people would think of the sermon He preached as recorded in **Matthew chapters 5-7**, often known as the Sermon on the Mount. If we want to understand why it is so important to develop quality of being, it is very helpful for us to spend time to read through again and again this Sermon recorded for us in **Matthew chapters 5-7**.

The Lord Jesus spoke at length in the presence of His disciples and in the background, with a large crowd of people. What was He seeking to communicate? Was the Lord Jesus seeking to teach many different things about life, many specific issues of life to help us to understand? Yes, we can say He covered many different areas of life. But were these just separate, isolated things that He wanted the people to understand?

If we read through again and again and seek to understand what was in the heart of the Lord Jesus when He preached this Sermon, it should not be very difficult for us to understand that there is a primary thrust in what He was saying throughout.

What was the primary thrust? We can see reasonably clearly that this primary thrust was to help us to become truly good and pure in the sight of God. The primary thrust is the moral quality of our being. You can look at any passage throughout this Sermon and you will notice that whatever the Lord Jesus was speaking about, He was constantly seeking to help the people to understand how important it is to develop the quality of our being. This has implications in every aspect of our lives and without this we cannot properly, meaningfully, effectively fulfil what God has created us for, what He wants us to be involved in, how to participate in what He wants to accomplish and to find true meaning in our lives.

We know that moral quality of being is very important and central in God's purposes in His creation of man. That is because at the heart of it are two very valuable and meaningful aspects in the moral and spiritual realm: We can say basically, moral character and pure relationships based on self-giving love. And these two aspects are very deeply related. It is from this that all other meaningful aspects of life will emerge and come forth.

Yes, the Scriptures record for us many, many different things, but we see that this central aspect is always present. God's intention, even in the many details of things that He records for us to understand, has a purpose in this direction. He wants us to develop to become like Him, so that we can be united with Him to fulfil what He wants to accomplish, and to develop a deep relationship with Him, a relationship of deep friendship.

In the last portion of this Sermon, we read a passage that expresses various aspects that can help us to understand why quality of being is so very important.

Matthew 7: 13-29

- 13 "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it.
- 14 For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.
- 15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.
- 16 You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they?
- 17 So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.
- 18 A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.
- 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.
- 20 So then, you will know them by their fruits.
- 21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*.
- 22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'
- 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'
- 24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.
- 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and *yet* it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.
- 26 Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.
- 27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."
- 28 When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching;
- 29 for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as their scribes.

Towards the end of this long Sermon, the Lord Jesus brought across various important issues for us to consolidate after having heard all that He had said. He said, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it." This is a warning. God has created us in love with a great purpose. He wants us to benefit from what He has done; He wants the very best for us. But the outcome may not be good and sadly, the outcome will not be good for the majority of people. The reason is: the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it.

Walking in the broad way is easy. It is a popular way. Many people are walking in it. If you want the popular way, you look around and you can quite readily see there are many things that are popular in this world, even among Christians. But the broad way, while it is easy, leads to destruction. There are many people who will walk in it. We need to take care. We can easily walk in that way. If we do not develop quality in our being, we will move in the direction of the broad way. We will move in the direction of destruction. The apostle Paul tells us that if we walk by the flesh, we will die; but if by the Spirit we put to death the practices of the body, we will live.

The Lord Jesus says, "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." It is a contrast between destruction and life, between death and life. The path that leads to life is narrow, the gate is small. It is not easy to walk in this path. Few are they who will find it. There is much that we need to do in order to walk in this path. Some people have said the gate is so narrow that if you want to bring many things from this world, you cannot get through it. If you want to get through that gate, you need to leave behind the things of this world. Well, that is an illustration but it can help us to think about it. If you want the many things in this world, you may not enter that narrow gate.

Are you determined enough to go through that gate, to ensure that this is what you really want; all other things do not really matter, you want to get in through that gate? Are you prepared to give up all that hinders in order to do that? The writer to the Hebrews tells us that we must lay aside all encumbrance and the sin that easily entangles us, so that we can live a life that is truly pleasing to God.

If we do not choose the path of life, the consequences are very serious. It is very, very important that we concentrate on this area: to develop true quality in our being. Otherwise, we will not find life; we will end up in destruction.

Not only are there people, in fact many people, who will move in the direction of destruction, there will also be people who will deliberately lead people astray in the path of destruction for their own ends. These, for example, are the false prophets. They have their own motives – selfish motives. They lead people astray.

And how do they come? The Lord Jesus said, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." So here, the Lord Jesus shows a contrast between the outward and the inward. Outwardly, they appear very harmless. They come ... in sheep's clothing. They may even appear attractive, pleasant and friendly. They come ... in sheep's clothing. However, inwardly, they are ravenous wolves. They are destructive, they will cause harm. They will eat you up because that is what they want for themselves.

Why does the Lord Jesus tell us, "inwardly, they are ravenous wolves"? That is because the primary issue that we must concentrate on is "inwardly". What are we inwardly?

It is easy for us to concentrate on what we appear to be outwardly, and that is what most people concentrate on. We want to give a good impression; we want people to like us. We want to say things and do things which people may respect or think that we are good and well.

But that is not what will truly help us. We can come in a form like sheep, appear very harmless, but what is it that is in our heart? Is our heart pure? Do we really care for people? Or are we concerned primarily about ourselves? Are we concerned about what is in God's heart and what is good and meaningful, or are we seeking for what is enjoyable for ourselves?

Inwardly, they are ravenous wolves. This is the issue that the Lord Jesus is talking about throughout the Sermon on the Mount. When He said, "When you pray, do not pray openly so that people can see your prayers and therefore praise you; when you pray, pray in secret so that God who sees your heart in secret will reward you", that does not mean that we cannot pray openly.

He is referring to the attitude, when we pray in that way in order to impress people: "Likewise, when you give, do not sound a trumpet before you so that people know you are giving so much to help others. But do so quietly because of genuine love and concern." Throughout, you will find the Lord Jesus, again and again, will help us to understand the importance of developing the quality in the heart, in the being.

And so He says, "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they?" Grapes are produced by the grape plant. Figs are produced by the fig tree. What kind of tree are we? What kind of plant are we? Are we thorns and thistles, or are we fig trees and vines? That is your being.

What kind of being have you developed; what kind of being are you developing? This being is going to produce a fruit. It is going to be manifested in your life. The fruit is what comes forth from that plant. What is it that is going to come forth from your life? And this will include the way you live each day, the words that you say, the things that you do, what is it that motivates you, what is it that comes from within your heart.

The Lord Jesus says, "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account for it in the Day of Judgment." And He is not referring to just the outward words. He is referring to the meaning of those words that come from the heart. With what kind of heart do we say the things that we say?

What is the meaning of that fruit? We can produce artificial fruits. They look like the real thing but they are not. So we may say things that appear very good. Like the Pharisees, they said many things that appeared good; they prayed long prayers that seemed spiritual. But these were artificial. They were not true fruit that was of quality. God wants us to produce good fruit and a good fruit must come from a good tree.

17 So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.

18 A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.

19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

20 So then, you will know them by their fruits.

If we want to understand people, we want to know the meaning of life in what we see around us, we must be careful not just to look at outward forms of things but to look at the meaning. When these aspects are expressed, what do they actually mean? Where do they come from? What kind of tree is it, what kind of fruit is it producing? What kind of spiritual impact it will have? What kind of effect it will have on us if we respond to that? If we follow that, where will it lead us?

We eat a poisonous fruit, we will be poisoned. We eat a healthy fruit, we will be nourished. The effect will be there.

The Lord Jesus went on to tell us, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*." There are many people who will acknowledge the Lord Jesus as Lord. They can call Him "Lord" and they may also do many things that seem to be in line with being His disciple. He says, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'" These things were done in the name of the Lord Jesus and surely, they must mean something very positive? That would be what it seems to be but in reality, it is not.

And this is something that is very common. We need to take care. If we do not develop quality in our being, this can easily happen. We may be doing many things in the name of the Lord Jesus, apparently effective, apparently helpful, but what is the real quality?

What is it that God is looking for? What kind of effect will it really have on others? Prophesying in His name, casting out demons, performing many miracles – these are activities that appear very important, helpful, spiritual. And in fact, there are people with great quality of being who do these things: who prophesy in the name of Christ, who cast out demons in His name, who perform miracles in His name. There are people like that. But it does not mean that those who cast out demons, those who prophesy and perform miracles are all doing so in fellowship with God.

The Lord Jesus says in **verse 23**: "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'" The underlying problem is: YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.

Again, it tells us it is the quality of being that is central. It is not these outward forms of things that determine who you are. It is where it comes from. When you do these things, what was your motive? What impelled you to do these things? What is the source of your power? Is it from God, is there life from Him? Or is it the power to perform miracles that is not from God?

When Moses contended with the magicians in Egypt, we see that Moses performed miracles. He threw the rod down, it became a serpent. The magicians did likewise. They also threw their rods and they also became serpents. Not all works of miracle, works of power are from God. The evil one also has great power to do many things. What is important is the source: where does it come from?

What is important is the spirit: with what spirit is it accomplished? YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS tells us the spirit is wrong, the life is wrong, the being is wrong. And so the Lord Jesus said, "DEPART FROM ME, I never knew you. There is no fellowship between you and Me. What you did, although outwardly in My name, is not in reality from Me."

There is a very wide range in terms of what is possible and it need not be to the extreme where it is totally not of the Lord. Many Christians may do various things in the name of the Lord and with His power to a certain degree. But because the quality of being is not deep enough, together with that, there are other elements of self-seeking which open the way for the evil one to work at the same time, and that is where it can be very confusing at times to know what is happening. But we need to take care and understand the principle: Whatever comes from a heart that is really in fellowship with God – that is positive. Whatever comes from a heart that is self-centred and that is energized by the powers of darkness – that would be negative. Whatever it is, the principle will always hold. It is the life or the death that comes from it.

And so the Lord Jesus tells us, "everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock." We can hear many things, we can understand many things, we can also transmit many things in words. But the critical issue the Lord Jesus is saying here is: Do you live by that?

When we understand what the Lord Jesus has said, are we prepared to act on them? Will we live by what we know and we believe in, we recognise is right? This is the critical thing and this is what determines quality in our being. Quality of our being cannot be developed just by listening to many things and saying, "I agree". We can hear the Sermon on the Mount, we can read it many times and say, "I agree". That does not bring about quality in our being. It can only come about when we act on them.

And acting on them is not primarily doing many things outwardly. Acting on them is first and foremost within the heart. Do we really appreciate what the Lord Jesus has said? Do we agree and accept? Will we obey? Will we trust? Will we follow? Are there conditions? Will we always follow Him, will we always trust Him? Or is it conditional: "Only if the Lord gives me this, then I will do that. Only if the Lord takes care of me in this way, then I will trust Him"?

If we know that what the Lord says is good, will we always trust Him? If we know that He is perfectly good, will we always believe in Him, always follow Him? If we do, then we will be like a man building his house on the rock. And when you build your house in that way, He says, it can withstand the storms that come. So this again is another aspect why it is so important. If we do not develop quality in our being, we cannot stand when the test comes. When the evil one attacks us, we cannot withstand his attacks. And the attacks can come in many different ways.

The evil one is very cunning. It does not have to come in the form of just physical problems. It can easily come in the form of a temptation to pride, arrogance, self-confidence, despising other people, thinking that we are much better, seeking to compete based on natural, fleshly activities. The evil one can easily draw us in that way and we can fall quite easily, if we do not develop that kind of quality in our being.

If we want the house to stand, we must make sure that we live by EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS from THE MOUTH OF GOD. We must be faithful to what we have come to understand is the right way to live.

And so He goes on to say the contrast: Those who hear His words and do not act on them, they are building on sand. And when the storm comes, it will collapse. It may appear to be a very strong, beautiful house but it will collapse. In the Day of Judgment, everything will be swept away and there is nothing left. We will not be able to withstand when the storm comes.

When the Lord Jesus had finished all this, the crowds were amazed at His teaching. Why were they amazed? Had they not heard many prophets speak, many people teach, many people say things? Why were they so amazed? **Verse 29** tells us: for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as their scribes. The Lord Jesus spoke to them with authority, not like the scribes. The scribes could say many things: "Yes, you should do this, you should do that." But they could recognise that they did not have that kind of authority that the Lord Jesus had.

Why is it there was such authority in the Lord Jesus? The basic answer is: behind those words was spiritual reality. The Lord Jesus said words that were backed up by His being. In His being was moral perfection, so the things that He spoke of what is morally good and right had power and life. And the people could recognise it.

Likewise, when we read Paul's epistles, when he says, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain", do we not sense the power behind those words? It is because behind those words there is that life given to God, a life where there is righteousness, meaningfulness, a being of quality. What if the Corinthian Christians, fleshly and carnal, were to say in a loud voice, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain"? Will we not recognise the difference? There will be a very great difference.

So too, we need to bear in mind that if we really want to stand in the context of being faithful to God, of being able to communicate what He wants us to, then we need to pay attention to the development of the quality of our being. Then the things that we say will have that value, the life and the power that go with it.

What the Lord Jesus preached in **Matthew chapters 5-7** can be summarized by **Matthew 5: 8**. As I see it, **Matthew 5: 8** helps to bring together all the major things that the Lord Jesus was seeking to communicate. Yes, He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit ... Blessed are the meek ... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness ..." but all these centre on this specific issue, **Matthew 5: 8**: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

The various things the Lord Jesus spoke of in the Sermon were meant basically to help us to develop that purity in our heart. And let us understand that the meaning of purity in heart in this context is not just that we do not sin, is not just that we are innocent, we have not committed any wrong. Non-moral beings never sin. Those who just come into this world, have not made their moral choice, they have not sinned. But that is not purity of heart.

Purity of heart is quality in the being that can withstand difficulties and problems, temptations and pressures and remain true to what is good.

If a person has never faced any difficulties in life and he says, "Yes, I will do what is right" and he does not do anything negative, that does not mean that he is pure. Although purity of heart comes from the heart and we can develop it even without facing specific situations, yet we need to recognise that when we are not tested by specific situations, we may not recognise whether the substance is properly developed or not.

It is quite easy for us to say, "I love God" when there is no difficulty in our lives. Can we truly say we love God when faced with difficult circumstances, when we are tempted by the evil one with many offers that are very attractive? Will we still remain true to the Lord?

Purity of heart would mean that in the midst of difficulties, problems, temptations, pressures, our loyalty to the Lord remains the same. We will always be true to Him, we will always choose what is good and right because it is good and right.

So the Lord Jesus tells us, "Blessed are the pure in heart".

You can be truly happy, truly satisfied, you can find true fulfilment in life when you are pure in heart. That is what brings true meaning, fulfilment, joy in our lives. Many people are seeking for that happiness in many, many things in this world and they will not find it because ultimately, blessedness comes about when you develop this quality in your being. When you develop purity of heart, you will find yourself very blessed.

But here, the Lord Jesus tells us that this blessedness is linked to a very, very important aspect of life, and that is: they shall see God. He said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." This blessedness is directly linked to seeing God.

Again, the term "seeing God" does not mean just being able to recognise who God is, seeing Him at a distance. All of us will see God on the Judgment Day. Satan and the evil spirits see God but they are not pure in heart. So the Lord Jesus is referring to seeing God in the context of a deep personal fellowship with Him where we can behold His glory at close distance, in a personal way, in deep fellowship with Him, where He appreciates us and we appreciate Him, there is free communication, there is love, devotion, fellowship, friendship of the highest level.

It is in the context of purity of heart that we will see God and this brings across to us the two major aspects that are most important in the moral and spiritual realm: moral character, relationships of the highest quality.

The Lord Jesus wants us to know that a deep and personal relationship with God is very, very precious, very, very meaningful. It will bring deep satisfaction and meaning to our lives. Is this what we long for; is this what we are aiming at? Do we want to develop that kind of fellowship with God?

He says if we want to develop that kind of fellowship with God, the only way by which you can attain to that is to be pure in heart because God is pure, perfectly pure, and if we are not pure, God will keep His distance. He can speak to us at a distance but not so close. The purer we are, the closer we can be to Him. The purer we are, the deeper the fellowship with Him. How important is fellowship with God to us?

The people of Israel were afraid to hear God and they asked Moses, "You listen to Him and you tell us." They were afraid to come near to God. Why? They knew that they were not pure. They were afraid of God because God would punish them. And God also did say, "If they were to come near for a moment, I will consume them" because there was something wrong in their heart. But Moses could come near to God because he loved God, he was identified with God, he was prepared to give up his life to live for God; and God loved him, God treated him as a friend, God spoke to him face to face.

Adam and Eve sought to hide from God when they sinned. And that is a picture that will always be helpful for us to be conscious of. When we are afraid of God, it is generally and basically because our hearts are not fully with Him.

When our hearts are fully with Him, we love Him, we will come near to Him. Perfect love casts out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. If we truly love God, we will delight to come into His presence, we will enjoy the fellowship with Him, we will appreciate how wonderful it is to know Him, to talk to Him, to be with Him. But if our hearts are not pure, we dare not come into His presence, we have difficulty praying to Him unless we pray like the Pharisees – just words – but if we want to pray from our hearts, deep fellowship, we have difficulties because we cannot draw near to God.

Then we go on to see the importance of purity of heart. **Matthew 5: 48.** The Lord Jesus says here,

Matthew 5: 48

Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

The meaning here is: Therefore you are to be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect. You are to be like Him – be like Him, be perfect like Him.

We are to develop the highest quality in our being, the highest level that we can attain, just like our heavenly Father is pure and good in His being.

Why did the Lord Jesus say this: that we are to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect? And here, He is not talking about God's perfection in terms of His power in creating the universe, His omnipotence; neither is He referring to omniscience, that He knows all things. He is referring to moral characteristics.

In this context, He was talking about loving others with a pure love – not just loving people who love you, doing good to people who do good to you, but the genuine concern for the well-being of others, including our enemies. He was talking about the quality of love that God has in His heart which He has shown towards all mankind. Even though we are enemies of God, yet He has loved us and He has suffered in order to help us.

So the Lord Jesus says, “you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” That is because moral quality of being is good in itself.

Yes, it is good from the angle that it leads us to deep fellowship with God. That is a very primary aspect – Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

But let us recognise that being pure in heart is a very, very good thing in itself. God is pure, perfectly pure and we can see that that is a very, very good thing. We appreciate Him, we love Him because we see in Him that goodness, and God finds true meaningfulness in His being, in His perfection. So developing quality in our being is something very good and meaningful in itself.

But some people may say, “If you seek to develop quality in your being, you concentrate on doing this, are you not being very self-centred, just thinking about yourself, developing and developing and developing your being?”

This is where there is a wrong concept that is prevalent. We are so used to living a self-centred life that we think developing quality in our being is also being self-centred.

But true quality of heart, true quality of being includes in it a very, very important aspect of a heart of self-giving. A heart of self-giving means that we are concerned for the well-being of other people, we are concerned for what is good and meaningful for others. If you do not develop that in your heart, then you are not truly pure in heart.

You cannot say that you are developing the quality of your being if you are just preoccupied with yourself. But it does not mean that when we care for other people, our approach in life is constantly to seek to do something to help people That also is not true purity of heart.

True purity of heart is within us, that attitude within us. What are we concerned about, what do we value? True purity of heart means we value that which is morally and spiritually good and perfect, and we want that to exist and to be developed wherever moral beings are. Whether it be ourselves or other people, we want to see it being developed.

That is why God says, “You are to LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” There is nothing wrong with loving yourself. You are to LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF, but it is in this kind of way: you love yourself in the sense that you want yourself to be good and pure and you want others likewise to be good and pure.

If that is your attitude, there will not be that competition: “Who is better?” There will not be the selfishness, there will not be seeking your own advantage at the expense of other people. If you truly love with a self-giving love, you are prepared to give of yourself for the well-being of other people.

So this is something that we need to appreciate clearly. Developing quality in our being is not a self-centred thing; it is a very, very important aspect so long as we understand the true meaning of developing quality in our being.

We are to be like God. Is God self-centred? No! The event of the cross helps us to see that God is so self-giving that He is prepared to go through such intense suffering in order to benefit us. He left heaven and its glory to come into this world, despised, forsaken, rejected by men, suffering a very, very painful and difficult time. Why did He do all this? Because of love – For God so loved the world. That is what motivated Him to help us.

Are we motivated by that in the things that we do? Or are we preoccupied with ourselves: what I can achieve, what I can attain, what I can gain, in whatever form we may be thinking of?

Let us go on to see how the Lord Jesus regarded this in His relationship with people.

John 2: 23-25

23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing.

24 But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men,
25 and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.

We are told that many believed in His name.

Many a preacher would be so thrilled when many people respond, they believe in the gospel, they respond to the preaching, they raise their hand, they stand up, they go forward, they proclaim Christ as their Saviour. Many would be so delighted with that.

But the Lord Jesus was not impressed when people said, "I believe". He looked beyond the words. He looked at their heart, what was happening within. Was it a true belief? Was it a belief that would lead to acting upon His words? Was it a belief that would transform their being? Or was it a belief of recognition, of agreement but does not deeply change the quality of being?

He was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men. That does not mean that God says all men are evil. That is not the meaning here. He knew all men in the sense that He looked beyond the outward forms of things, He saw what was in the heart of man and He saw that for these people who believed in Him, their belief was not deep, there was not that reality of commitment within them.

But there were others who were positive, others who were genuine in their belief, others who were prepared to follow Him deeply. The Lord also knew. He saw.

So this again helps us to see why quality of being is so very important. God knows what is in our heart. We cannot deceive Him by the outward things that we do. Whether He can trust us or not, whether He will entrust Himself to us or not will depend on this. He looks at our heart.

Men look at the outward appearance but God looks at the heart.

The phrase here is interesting. We are told that the Lord Jesus was not entrusting Himself to them. This means that in some situations, the Lord Jesus might entrust Himself. What would that mean?

I will say that the basic meaning of that would be that God wants to develop a very deep relationship with us such that He can entrust Himself to us, in that He is prepared to share with us deep personal things in His heart, in His being, as a close Friend, so that we can know what is deeply within Him, appreciate and work together and relate.

This is what God is calling us towards: to become His friends, that He can share with us deeply what is in His heart.

But He cannot do that if He cannot trust us; He cannot do that if He sees within our heart so much of self-seeking: We are not really interested in God; we are not really interested in what is important to Him. We are more interested in what we can get, what we want for ourselves. In that kind of state, God cannot entrust Himself to us, neither can He entrust to us things that are very important to Him for us to be involved in.

It is true that God can still work in our lives, God can still work through us in spite of us, in spite of our failures, our difficulties, but that is limited.

The more we love Him, the more there is quality in our being, the more God can truly entrust things to us and also, He is prepared to draw near to us; we can see Him personally.

Let us turn to another passage that helps us see that until the end of the record of the Scriptures, in the last book, the Lord Jesus was still talking about this. It is so important.

Revelation 2: 1-7

- 1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:
- 2 The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:
- 3 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be* false;
- 4 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.
- 5 But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.
- 6 Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.
- 7 Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.
- 8 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'

Why is it the Lord Jesus, in the last book of the Scriptures, is still emphasizing the importance of repentance? Will we not think that by this stage, Christians have developed, the Lord should be very glad and very happy, He should be praising them for the way that they have lived their lives and served Him? Should He not be very glad and rejoicing?

Yes, the Lord does rejoice in whatever is positive, but notice, He is not satisfied. The Lord Jesus is very concerned and there are consequences. "Yes, I know your deeds, and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men. Yes, I know that you do love Me. You are concerned about what is right, you are doing many things that are good."

He appreciates that, He recognises, He acknowledges but in the midst of that, He raised one thing. We may not recognise this as important but this is very important. He says, "But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love." And this was so important that He said, "If you do not repent, I will come to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent."

Although they were quite positive, they were doing many things right, yet the Lord Jesus told them to repent because they lost their first love. Why is the first love so important?

The first love is very important in the quality of relationship, the quality of fellowship.

Do we really love the Lord Jesus, do we really love God so much that we are constantly occupied with Him in our hearts, that we are so enthusiastic about Him, that we are constantly seeking to appreciate what is in His heart and we want to live for Him, to walk with Him, do things together with Him?

Do we have that kind of earnestness, that eagerness, the freshness in our love for the Lord? Or are we now doing many things as a duty? Yes, we are disciples of the Lord, we need to read the Scriptures, we need to share the gospel, we need to attend meetings. We do them faithfully, we do all these things, we persevere. We do many things right. But where is that love, where is that depth of fellowship, where is that closeness, the freshness which we may have had at the beginning?

When we first came to know the Lord, we were so thrilled that we know Him, we appreciated Him so much, we talked about Him, we thought about Him. But as time passes by, this has dimmed.

Why? Because there is not sufficient quality in our being. When our hearts are really pure, we will be drawn close to the Lord, we will be so close to Him because it is so wonderful to be close to Him. But if our heart is not pure, we will end up doing things because it is difficult to keep so close to the Lord. It is so difficult to be enthusiastic about Him all the time. We get tired, we get bored: "Same thing all the time."

We may want to do many things for the Lord, we want to be occupied with many other things. Yes, we want to serve Him, we want to do things for Him. But can we enjoy that quality of fellowship with Him because we truly love Him, He is so precious to us, we appreciate His goodness, we understand what is in His heart?

The first love, the quality of love, the meaning of love, the freshness of love is very important in the development of this kind of fellowship and friendship with God.

God wants to develop a deep friendship with all of us but it can happen only if we are prepared to take the steps necessary, and the primary step that we need to take is to develop quality in our being.

So we can see that it is very important from many different angles that you look at it. It involves every aspect of our lives. All the important things in life centre on this. If we deviate from this, all other things will diminish in its value, in its meaning.

The Lord willing, we will consider further how quality of being will lead to various other important aspects of life which we may want to be involved in. But we need to understand that these important aspects must come forth from that quality of being. The more we develop that quality, the more all these other areas will grow in meaning. Of course, it does not mean that only when we have developed to the very highest level of quality then all these other aspects can have meaning. It is a matter of degree. The more you develop quality in your heart, the more it will bring meaning to everything that you do. But we need to see the correct emphasis. If we go about the wrong way, then the meaning will dissipate, will become less and less, and we may not even realise when there is not much meaning left, we still carry on doing many things which we think are very good.

So then today, I have sought to consider with you why it is so important to develop quality in our being. If we neglect this, then life will no more be present, we will walk in the path that leads to destruction increasingly. The more the quality of being diminishes, the more the principle of death will set in. The more we develop quality of being, the more life will be abundant in us.

So let us ask the Lord to help us to see these issues more deeply and clearly. You read through the whole of the Scriptures, you will find that this theme comes through again and again throughout the Scriptures. The thrust is there. That is why the Sermon on the Mount has this primary thrust. It is the same as the rest of the Scriptures. And the Lord Jesus came into this world to help us understand this, as well as to show to us how to live like that, and to enable us to become like that.

So let us then come before the Lord and ask Him to search our hearts, help us understand ourselves, so that where we have gone astray, we ask Him to forgive us and to be corrected. Where we have been moving in the right direction, let us ask Him to help us to be determined to press on to develop further.

Let us recognise that it is through the cross that we can find that life. The cross is the path of pain and suffering and it was that that brought life to us. If we want to receive that life and develop that life in us, we too will need to learn the principle of the cross. It will be difficult to develop quality in our being. If we are not prepared for that, then we will not be able to benefit from what the Lord Jesus has done for us at the cross. So let us ponder over what the Lord has done and ask Him to help us to respond to Him the right way, so that we can truly benefit, receive His life, be transformed and be able to live in the way that He intends for us.