

Matthew – Sermon on the Mount

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Sermon on the Mount – Introduction

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- 1) Before we begin, as with our last study of James, I will post the complete notes for the lesson on the biblical-matters.com website and send you an email with a direct link to the PDF file.
- 2) One thing that is different for this series of lessons is that I now have permission to use the ESV on the website so, I will be using it for the scripture references.
 - a) I have found that the ESV reads somewhat less rocky than the NASB.
- 3) One more aside before we begin.
 - a) Last week I made a statement regarding shepherds. Since then, I have done some further checking and found what I think is a more correct assessment of their situation in Jesus' time:
 - b) Shepherds being ritually unclean, is not supported by first-century Jewish sources.
 - c) What the sources actually say is:
 - i) They are not connected with ritual impurity laws like tanners are.
 - ii) Some later rabbinic texts portray shepherds as unreliable or prone to theft (e.g., Tosefta *Bava Qamma* 11.14),
 - (1) They often grazed animals on others' land (seen as stealing).
 - (2) They lived on the edges of society.
 - (3) What bad reputation they had was moral and social, not ceremonial.
- 1) Ok, as an introduction to this study of the Sermon on the Mount, we will look at 4 basic questions:
 - a) *Where is Jesus in his ministry.*
 - b) *Who is the audience for the sermon?*
 - c) *What is Jesus' purpose in delivering this sermon?*
 - d) *And finally, why bring this sermon at this time?*

So, let's start with the first question – “Where is Jesus in his ministry?”

- 2) To do that, we need to step back into the chapter before the actual sermon begins.
- 3) Matthew tells us in the beginning verses of chapter 4 about Jesus' temptation in the desert.
- 4) Then, beginning in verse 12 we read of Jesus' move from Nazareth, his home since childhood, to Capernaum.
- 5) Some of your translations may have the added comment “Jesus Begins His Ministry” this is borne out by Matthew's comment in verse 17.

Matthew 4:12–17 (ESV)

Jesus Begins His Ministry

¹² Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. ¹³ And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

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- 15 “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
16 the people dwelling in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,
on them a light has dawned.”

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

The next question is “Who is the audience?”

- 1) As we continue to read in chapter 4, we see Jesus teaching throughout Galilee.
- 2) Matthew tells us in verses 23 to 25 ...

Matthew 4:23–25 (ESV)

Jesus Ministers to Great Crowds

²³ And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. ²⁴ So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. ²⁵ And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

- 3) These “great crowds” of this last verse are a major part of the audience.
- 4) However, during this time in Capernaum, He chooses his first disciples.
 - a) Of course, they were Peter and his brother Andrew and James and John, also brothers – sons of Zebedee.
- 5) During this time Jesus may have also chosen 1 or 2 other disciples – Nathaniel, Philip.
 - a) Even though Matthew was a resident of Capernaum as were Peter, Andrew, James, and John he is not chosen until later (chapter 9).
 - b) There were other disciples that are not named at this point.
 - c) The others may or may not be dedicated and stay with Jesus as time goes on.
- 6) Regardless of their reasons and actual numbers they are the disciples whom Jesus gathers around him for this great sermon.
- 7) What about the crowds?
- 8) When we begin to look at this, we must assume that the crowds which Matthew is describing in this last verse of chapter 4 are the crowds who are listening throughout chapters 5 through 7.
- 9) When we do that, we must take note of a very important fact about this gathering.
 - a) Matthew makes a definite point of mentioning two distinct Gentile areas. The area beyond the Jordan and the Decapolis.

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- i) The area beyond the Jordan was predominately Gentile but not completely however, one would assume there were a number of Gentiles included in the crowd from there.
- ii) The Decapolis was a group of 10 Gentile cities.
 - (1) This is the location of the famous demon removal into the herd of pigs of Matt 8.
- b) So, there was a portion of this crowd that was Gentile from the Decapolis as well.
 - i) We really can't ascertain a definite percentage, although the total was probably a small number.
- 10) The important point here is that even a small portion of the audience being Gentile says they know of Christ and want to hear his message.
- 11) The people who are part of the crowds are likely to be varied in their reasons for being there.
- 12) Regardless of their reasons, they are the 'crowd' portion of the audience for this great sermon.
- 13) Luke sums this audience up when he calls this it "... a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people ..."

Now, "What is Jesus' purpose in delivering this sermon?"

- 1) The predominate view is that it is a presentation of Jesus' authoritative teaching on what it means to live as a faithful member of God's kingdom here and now.
 - a) This kingdom is the "now kingdom," the new covenant community that is being established in the church that is coming.
 - b) This covers both inward character and outward conduct.
 - c) Key themes under this purpose are:
 - i) Inner righteousness over external legalism (e.g., anger vs. murder, lust vs. adultery).
 - ii) Love, mercy, humility, and reconciliation as kingdom virtues.
 - iii) Dependence on God's grace and trust in His provision.
 - iv) Integrity and sincerity in worship and daily life.
- 2) Though there are several other views of purposes for the sermon, the second and I personally think equally important purpose is Christ showing himself and his teachings as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.
 - a) Jesus himself states this in chapter 5:17-20. Verse 17 says:

Matthew 5:17 (ESV)

Christ Came to Fulfill the Law

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.

- b) Jesus shows his teachings as the fulfillment of the Law in many ways and we will discuss them as we encounter them.
- c) However, as a preview, one important way is in the many statements he makes that have a format like or similar to ...

"You have heard... but I say to you."

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- d) As we will see, this is a clear indicator of Jesus' authority to interpret and bring to fulfillment the divine Law and to set right many of the burdensome rules and misinterpretations of the Pharisees.
- 3) In all of this, we will see Jesus spelling out the law of the new covenant community.
- 4) And as such, it lays out the requirements for the **radical discipleship** that being part of that covenant community demands.

And the final question is – “Why bring this sermon at this time?”

- 1) I think this is an easy one, Jesus is at the beginning of his ministry and as such, what better time to lay that firm foundation.
- 2) Jesus states this clearly in the final parable of the sermon:

Matthew 7:24–25 (ESV)

Build Your House on the Rock

²⁴ “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”

- a) This was not just for the disciples but for all those who were listening to this message.
- b) This sermon captures the heart or core of Jesus' ethical and kingdom teaching.
- 3) If we move the question of “**why this sermon at this time**” to this moment in our lives, God himself tells us why at the transfiguration in His own words.
- 4) In this situation, Peter was in the process of offering to build three booths or tents, one for Moses, one for Elijah and one for Jesus when God overshadows the three apostles with a bright cloud.

Matthew 17:5 (ESV)

⁵ He (*Peter*) was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; **listen to him.**”

- 5) And, that should be the message to us – **listen to him!**

- 1) Let's set the scene ...

Matthew 5:1 (ESV)

The Sermon on the Mount

5 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

- a) I'm sure we have all seen the Sermon on the Mount scene depicted in pictures or images of Christ standing in a high position with the multitudes surrounding him.
- b) As we can see from this first verse, that is simply not the case.
 - i) Jesus is seated and his disciples come to him probably sitting on the ground around his position.

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- ii) As we said a bit ago, Luke calls this audience “... a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people ...”
- c) The crowd (non-disciples) were listening and learning, but they were probably sitting outside the group of disciples immediately surrounding him.
- d) Again, they are not the primary target of the address.
- e) We have all called this the Sermon on the Mount forever and I am not suggesting we change that.
 - i) However, the truth is, the titles the translators have added to the sections throughout the years have called it a sermon but there is no reference in scripture to that.
 - ii) When we look at this, in truth, I would call it more of a “teaching” than a sermon as we think of it.
 - iii) This is especially true in the light of the audience and what we have said the purposes of the message were.
 - iv) This is not a big deal but, please allow that “**teaching**” word to be present in your thinking as we continue this study over the next number of weeks.
- f) Knowing that we are his disciples and we should look at ourselves as sitting on the ground around the Master as he delivers to us a teaching that will change our lives.
- 2) Although this message is compact in the gospel renderings (only takes 10-15 minutes to read aloud), some scholars estimate that this set of teachings may have been much longer. perhaps several hours or even over a day.
- 3) One other aspect of the sermon we should address is that of the “kingdom.”
 - a) Jesus speaks of the kingdom throughout these teachings and He speaks of it as both the future kingdom of a new heaven and new earth and the NOW kingdom.
 - b) The NOW kingdom is that kingdom of which we are a part as His disciples.
 - c) The lessons we receive here are showing us how to live in that NOW kingdom as God wants and needs us to so we may become proper members of the future fully realized kingdom at the resurrection.
- 4) So, moving on into the sermon itself.
- 5) Jesus begins his teaching with what we have come to call the beatitudes.
- 6) The word beatitude truly means supreme blessedness.
- 7) As we read these straight through from verse 2 to 12, with each one, ask yourself the question “should I be the person in each of these who is BLES SID.”

Matthew 5:2–12 (ESV)

The Beatitudes

² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

BLES SID!!

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

⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

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⁵ “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸ “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹ “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

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

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.

Did you find any that you should not be?

- 8) Before we move into the details, we need to decide on a more concise definition of the word “Blessed beyond supreme blessedness. (bless_sid)”
- 9) If we look at the history of word itself, we see that it was first used in English in the **late 12th century**.
 - a) Wyclif used the word in the first English translation of the Bible in 1382 from the Latin Vulgate.
 - i) The word in classical and ecclesiastical Latin, “beatus” which means “happy,” “fortunate,” “prosperous,” or “blessed (by God).”
 - ii) It implies a state of spiritual well-being.
 - iii) Not merely a feeling of happiness but the condition of being approved by God and destined for divine favor.
 - b) Further, Tyndale (1526): “Happy are the poor in spirit” — highlighting the inner joy.
 - c) KJV (1611): “Blessed are the poor in spirit” — emphasizing divine approval.
 - d) If we jump back about 12 more centuries from the point at which “blessed” in this context came into being, the word in the Greek is **μακάριος**.
- 10) Scott McKnight did a translation of the New Testament he called the “Second Testament.”
 - a) In it, he tries to help English readers experience what the Greek reader experiences in reading the New Testament in Greek.
 - b) His translation begins each beatitude with God blesses ...
 - c) As an example, Matt 5:3 reads ...

Matthew 5:3 (Second Testament)

³ God blesses the beggars in spirit because theirs is Heavens’ Empire.

- d) Interesting wording and with it I think you catch the drift of where he is trying to do.
- e) The source of these blessings is God!

A lot said but, can we Agree that McKnight is probably correct in his translation “God Blesses”?

- 11) When one looks at the beatitudes most of them seem paradoxical.

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- a) The condition of the subject and the corresponding blessedness do not fit together.
 - i) It makes us want to say – What? – How can this be?
- 12) By normal human standards ‘poor in spirit’ humility, mourning, desire for righteousness, mercy, and persecution are not the stuff of which happiness is made, or joy comes from.
- 13) So, again, we must know that God Blesses,