

The Sermon on the Mount

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES FROM THE
MEN'S MORNING FELLOWSHIP

Matthew 5:1 And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.

Matthew 5:2 Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

The Sermon on the Mount is often misunderstood and, thus, misapplied:

1. One group says it is God's plan of salvation, that if we ever hope to go to heaven we must obey these rules.
2. Another group calls it a "charter for world peace" and begs the nations of the earth to accept it.
3. Still a third group tells us that the Sermon on the Mount does not apply to today, but that it will apply at some future time, perhaps during the Tribulation or the millennial kingdom.

What Jesus said in verse twenty is a key to how we are to understand and apply His words:

Matthew 5:20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

The main theme is true righteousness. Righteousness is how to be right with God.

The religious leaders had an artificial, external righteousness based on Law. But the righteousness Jesus described is a true and vital righteousness that begins internally, in the heart. The Pharisees were concerned about the minute details of conduct, but they neglected the major matter of *character*. Conduct flows out of character.

Whatever applications the Sermon on the Mount may have to world problems, or to future events, it is certain that this sermon has definite applications for us today. Jesus gave this message to individual believers, *not* to the unsaved world at large. What was taught in the Sermon on the Mount is repeated in the New Testament epistles for the church today.

Matthew 5:1 *And seeing the multitudes...*

It can't be proved, but it's possible that the Sermon on the Mount was Jesus' "standard" sermon. It was the core of His itinerant message: a simple proclamation of how God expects us to live, contrasting with common Jewish misunderstandings of that life. It may be that when Jesus preached to a new audience, He often preached this sermon or used the themes from it.

Matthew 5:1 *...He went up on a mountain...*

The 'sanctuary' for the greatest sermon ever preached was really a large hill. Until this sermon, it was just another of the many sloping hills. Jesus' words sanctified it to His disciples. It was now *the mount* for them.

Matthew 5:1 *... and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.*

A rabbi commonly sat while he taught. If he taught while standing or walking, it was considered casual, informal, or unofficial. Sitting to teach was a posture, a body language, that indicated formality and authority. That's why even today we speak of professors as holding a "chair" of their department. Some of you with Roman Catholic backgrounds have heard of the pope speaking *ex cathedra*. It is a pronouncement that is an official and authoritative. It literally means, *from his chair*.

The listeners always stood. It speaks of attention and respect.

There was a vast audience comprised of both disciples and inquirers. *His disciples* were the intended audience; both those who were currently following Jesus, and any who would choose to follow Him after the sermon.

His twelve disciples would understand the righteousness Jesus spoke about in this sermon as the potential for living that was theirs as they followed Him and depended upon the Holy Spirit.

The inquirers would see the standard of God's righteousness was impossible to keep apart from faith in Jesus.

We will say this a lot: It is impossible to apply the principles and practices of the Sermon on the Mount unless you are born-again. They require the indwelling, empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. As one author put it, *One cannot behave like Jesus Christ until one becomes like Jesus Christ.*

Matthew 5:2 Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

This isn't just to state the obvious! These were the common words an author would use to introduce the idea that what was about to be said was of utmost importance. Think of a State of the Union address. Everyone knows who the president is; he is truly a man needing no introduction! Still, he is introduced when they say, *"Ladies and gentlemen, the president of the United States."* What he is about to say is thus elevated in importance.

He **taught** His disciples. Thus, as I mentioned earlier, the sermon is not a plan for salvation. It is a way of supernatural living for the saved.

For example: A little later Jesus will call His hearers the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Obviously He means to be addressing disciples, not unbelievers.

His words were not meant as a way of improving the social or political conditions on the earth. It wasn't then; it isn't now. Most Jews believed their Messiah would be a political leader who would act militarily to free them from the yoke of Rome. But the thrust of Jesus' core sermon is that the work of the Messiah is first internal, not external; it is spiritual rather than material. There are no politics or social reforms in the sermon – only spiritual transformation.

The social-gospel interpretation was pretty well obliterated by the two world wars of last century. Still, there are always those who feel that if societies would just follow the sermon, a lasting world peace would result.

The sermon is certainly not meant for the Tribulation or the Millennium. Those who believe it is think that Jesus was giving the Law for His kingdom on earth. But then the Jews killed Him and the kingdom was delayed. In-between is the Church Age in which the sermon has no application. When the Lord returns to establish the postponed kingdom – then, they say, we will live this way.

Jesus called upon His disciples to live out these things **right then** – not in the future kingdom age. Every principle taught in the sermon is repeated in some form in the NT letters – meaning it is for right here and right now.

Jesus said, **The kingdom of God is among you**. As we bow to the King's authority, we become citizens of the heavenly kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount defines who we are through the grace of God working in our lives. It's impossible standards are made possible by God indwelling us. They mark the distinctive lifestyle that should characterize the direction, if not the perfection, of our lives as Christians.

- being changed to bring change -
Throughout the sermon we will see the effect of grace upon the Law of God. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones compares the Christian life to the playing of music. A person may be able to play a great piece of music, by Beethoven for example, without making a single error. But it can be mechanical and not have the essence of what the composer intended. Accurate playing is not what makes a great musician. It is the expression – what lies behind the notes that make the music.

Faithful Christians know and are concerned about the letter of God's Law; but more so about knowing and expressing its spirit.

The Sermon on the Mount takes God's Law to the highest level of expression by the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is, in fact, an elaboration on the one commandment Jesus gave us: That we love God with all

our heart, mind, soul and strength; and that we love others one another as He has loved us.

We are not being told to live like this in order to be Christians. We are told that because you are a Christian, you can live like this.

