

The Sermon on the Mount Study Matthew 5-7

Introduction

The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 was most likely not delivered as a single sermon. Theologians believe Matthew chose to summarize all of Jesus' teaching and put it in one place. This would explain why Luke's sermon on the plain is much shorter, though it does contain the essence of what Matthew included. Jesus preached this sermon soon after choosing His disciples, but there were others in attendance that day, as well. Matthew 4:25 describes a mixed multitude of Gentiles and Jews who followed Jesus to hear His teaching.

I have heard it preached in a Baptist church that the Sermon on the Mount was directed to the Jews, who decided to reject the Messiah's kingdom. Because of this, the preacher said that this sermon does not apply to the age of grace but will only be enforced in the Millennial reign of Christ. However, if this were the case, it would make more sense that Jesus would have gathered the religious Jews to hear His message. He did not do this. His message, rather, was directed toward the outcasts.

The disciples themselves had not been chosen by other teachers. They were all working in their fathers' professions or had started their careers. Those from Galilee were despised by the more educated Jews who lived near Jerusalem. Those from Decapolis were a mixed religious group, some of whom worshiped other gods. There were some from Jerusalem and Judea, and many who had followed John the Baptist, who was also considered an outcast by the religious leaders.

Matthew wrote his book to Jews, so that they might see how Jesus fulfilled every prophecy regarding the Messiah in the Old Testament. Jesus was the Prophet promised by Moses who would be greater than Moses. (Deuteronomy 18:15-18.) At Mount Sinai, the people saw God as a consuming fire upon the mountain, and they were afraid. They asked for Moses to just bring them God's Word because they thought they would die. Jesus was the fulfillment of their prayers. He was the One who would have all of God's Words in His mouth, so that He could bring them to a people who were not holy enough to receive them directly from God.

As Moses gave God's commandments to the people at Mt. Sinai, now Jesus was teaching what God intended with His Law from the beginning. Jesus explained that God always meant for His Law to be obeyed from the inside out. Obedience required more than the outer appearance. God wanted the heart of His people to be sanctified, and then their actions would come from a place of sincerity and not performance.

Whereas the Jews believed the Messiah would come to bring Rome's rule to an end and usher in power and prosperity to God's people, Jesus introduced a new kingdom that looked nothing like this idea. Instead of prosperity, Jesus commended poverty of spirit. Instead of frivolity and joy, Jesus promised comfort for those who mourn. Instead of power, Jesus commanded meekness. He did not promise blessings to those who thought they were already achieving righteousness, but to those who knew they fell far short of God's perfection. Jesus defined the terms of His Kingdom in this sermon, and it defied everything the Jews in the first century thought the Messiah would offer. It still defies everything most Christians believe that Christ offers today. Followers of Christ do well to study this Sermon and determine whether they are living out the blessed life Jesus taught.

The Blessings

The word beatitude comes from a Latin word that means blessed or happy. Messianic Rabbi Jason Sobel describes the Hebrew equivalent for blessed as *ashrei*. He explains that the best translation of this word is "praiseworthy or a joyful recipient of divine favor and approval."¹ Rather than beginning His sermon with a list of laws, Jesus confers God's favor on those who probably thought they were not favored or even seen by God. Read Matthew 5:3-11 and note who Jesus said were the favored ones.

How do these descriptions contrast with who seems to be living a blessed life?

In Matthew 5:3, Jesus pronounces a blessing on the poor in spirit. Jesus would later illustrate this with his account of the publican and Pharisee praying in the Temple. Read Luke 18:9-14 and note the difference between the one who thought he was already favored by God and the one who knew he was a sinner. From this illustration, what defines someone as poor in spirit?

Was this publican's humility sincere, or was he putting on a show of false humility?

From Matthew 5:3, what did Jesus promise as the blessing of being poor in spirit?

Note the verb tense used. Does Jesus promise this in the present or the future?

¹ (Sobel 2025, 110)

Two other passages of Scripture that speak of this kind of poverty of Spirit are Psalm 51:17 and Isaiah 57:15. What are the promises attached to this spirit of contrition and humility?

Oddly enough, Jesus begins His sermon with a low bar for entry into His Kingdom. Anyone can enter! Those who do not think they could ever be good enough on their own are invited to Jesus' Kingdom. Those who have been rejected, cast out, uninvited, and overlooked are just the people Jesus calls to follow Him.

It is especially important to recognize that Jesus is teaching this sermon to His disciples, but His pronouns direct the disciples toward those who are also listening to Jesus' words. He does not direct His Words to them until verse 11. Jesus wants His followers to see those who do not measure up to the standards of the Law. Those are the ones He is inviting to join Him. Only those who know their spiritual poverty would want what He offers--a place in His Kingdom! Have you heard Jesus's invitation? How did you respond? Why is this the best news ever? Consider writing a prayer of gratitude in the space below.