**The Sermon on the Mount: An Overview**

**Matthew 5-7**

The Sermon on the Mount is almost indisputably the single greatest discourse ever given. It wasn’t given at an especially important moment in history, nor was it delivered by the most educated or influential person in the world at that time. It was not delivered to kings or queens, to congress, to parliament or to nobles. We can’t even be certain what year it was delivered or on what mountain. Therefore, it is not the *context* which makes this discourse so great, but the *content*. The basic ethical principles in the sermon are not meant for the scholars or the highly educated, but for the everyday man.

Though the context isn’t *essential* to understanding and appreciating much of the sermon, it nonetheless adds much depth to the words and meaning. Historically, we know that it was delivered in Galilee, probably on a hill near Capernaum around the start of Christ’s ministry. He was speaking mostly to fellow Jews who were living under Roman rule and awaiting the promised Messiah who they believed would establish a powerful, earthly, physical kingdom. Jesus had begun His ministry around the age of 30 by proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom.

More important is its context in God’s divine plan of redemption:

1. Abraham was promised that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 22:18)
2. Moses was promised that a prophet would arise after him whom the people would need to listen to (Deuteronomy 18:17-18)
3. David was promised that a descendant of his would establish an eternal kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12-13)
4. Isaiah promised the Israelites the coming of one called “Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace” and that he would establish his government/kingdom forever (Isaiah 9:6-7)
5. Daniel informed King Nebuchadnezzar that God would establish His kingdom in the days of the Roman empire (Daniel 2:44)
6. John the Baptist appeared proclaiming ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’ (Matt 3:1)
7. Jesus came echoing the news of the imminent Kingdom (Matt 4:17, 23; Mark 9:1)

God had been preparing man for at least 2000 years of the coming Messiah and the Kingdom He would establish. The Kingdom was formally established on the Day of Pentecost when Peter (who had been given the keys to the kingdom – Matt 16:19) opened the doors and let men enter in (Acts 2:38-41). Therefore, in the final years before the Kingdom was established, Jesus came to teach people how they were to be a citizen of it. He taught them the ethical requirements for someone who was to be a Kingdom citizen.

The Kingdom of God was not physical, but spiritual. There are no physical requirements for one to be a citizen of the Kingdom of God (nationality, geography, age, education, wealth etc.). However, there are spiritual conditions that must be met. If we desire to be members of the Kingdom of God, the body of Christ, the church, the family of God, the temple, we must listen to the sermon on the mount and submit to it.

*Daniel Smith*

**The Beatitudes**

**Matthew 5:1-12**

The first word of the first recorded sermon in the New Testament is “happy”. Everybody is interested in happiness – we’re hard-wired to seek it. God is interested in man’s happiness for there are 826 ‘happy’ texts in the Bible. Any religion or philosophy has to deal with happiness, but what is happiness? It is not easy to define but we know when we are and when we aren’t .More importantly, how do you go about finding it? This is really the crucial issue – man chooses his way to find happiness which so often results in emptiness and dissatisfaction, but God has His way which seems to involve startling contradictions.

Jesus presents 7 ‘beatitudes’ beginning with “Happy the poor in spirit”. The ancient philosophers such as the Stoics did not reckon humility among the moral virtues but Christ put it first and it is the key to the rest. Without humility we cannot know God and we will feel we do not need the gospel. We must we able to say “O wretched man that I am”, but such a person can be happy because such a person can enter the Kingdom. (Matt.18:3,4)

Whoever thought sorrow was essential to happiness? Not all mourning is guaranteed a blessing but godly sorrow is (2 Cor. 7:10). If there is no sorrow for sin there can be no joy of salvation. There may be tears in the evening but joy will come in the morning.

Meekness is commonly misunderstood – it is not cringing or spineless, but rather the Greeks used it of a horse ready to accept the bridle. It is a willingness to yield one’s strength in the service of God and man. It is the opposite of self-will and the domination of others. This is a key to enjoying life on earth.

Appetite is a sign of life and for happiness we must desire righteousness, not happiness. We can hunger and thirst after riches or power and never get them, but righteousness is attainable for all. One can be filled (2 Cor. 5:21)

The world says happiness is ‘getting even’, and ‘revenge is sweet’. But keeping score brings no happiness and neither does ruthlessness. God says that the merciful are happy because they receive it for themselves, both from God and man.(Mic.6:8)

“Sinners have more fun” may be the philosophy of many who would “waltz with the Devil”, and rather “laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints”, but will they see God? ‘Every eye shall see Him’, but not all will see Him in life or eternity. Many whose minds have been dulled by sin cannot see God in creation, (Rom.1:19-21). “This is my Father’s world” puts a whole new worldview in one’s outlook on life, and besides, would the impure really enjoy Heaven?

Being peacemakers may have been the last thing many would have expected to hear about the coming Kingdom. How could it come to be without first taking up arms and driving out the Romans? Seeking peace with all our being has its rewards for in that we follow the Prince of Peace who came seeking peace (Luke 2:14). This is not ‘peace at any price’ for the wisdom of God is first pure, then peaceable, but contentious people are never happy people (Prov.6:16,19).

Happy the persecuted for theirs is the Kingdom. So we come full circle from the first beatitude. Usually kingdoms were gained by those at the top – not those persecuted. It seems as if Jesus is intimating that the pursuit of happiness in this fashion would lead to conflict, and that the presence of the kingdom of righteousness in a wicked world would be counter-cultural, and true happiness will have a cost but a wonderful compensation.

What is real happiness? To be happy is to be in the kingdom, to receive comfort, inherit the earth, be made righteous, receive mercy, to see God and be His child. When one follows the philosophy of humility, penitence, meekness, craving for righteousness, mercy, inward purity and peaceableness, one is guaranteed a lifestyle that will cost something. But when, after striving to do right and everything goes wrong, happiness is to know that a heavenly reward awaits.

*Ian Coker*

**Salt and Light**

1. You are light
2. Light has a purpose
   * If it’s hidden under a bushel it’s not fulfilling its purpose

Conclusion: You have a purpose

**Matthew 5:13-16**

It is noteworthy that very few illustrations used in the teachings of New Testament need in-depth historical interpretation to understand. A story about farmers, fisherman, soldiers, athletes or builders can be understood by just about anyone regardless of time and place. This is certainly the case with Matthew 5:13-16. Jesus uses two universally experienced objects to illustrate an important principle that he needs His followers to understand. These are: *salt* and *light*.

There are many ways Bible students have taken salt and light to represent Christian living. Some speak of salt’s preserving nature and that Christians are therefore preservers of truth. Some make a point of light’s pure nature and thus Christians are to be pure and not mix with darkness. Although these are not incorrect or inconsistent with Christian doctrine, these perhaps go astray on the direct meaning Jesus was conveying through this teaching.

In these verses, I believe there are two central teachings:

1. Kingdom citizens have a purpose
2. Your purpose is to *A)* be a light bearer and *B)* thereby bring glory to God

Let’s examine these teachings individually.

**1. Kingdom citizens have a purpose (vs 13-15)**

Jesus uses two illustrations (using salt and light) to make the one point. The point is, these things are useless if they’re not fulfilling their purpose. The obvious conclusion is that followers of Christ need to recognise their purpose and fulfil it. Perhaps this is best represented as a syllogism:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Vs 13 | Vs 14-15 |
| Premise A | You are salt | You are light |
| Premise B | Salt has a distinct purpose | Light has a distinct purpose |
| Conclusion | You have a distinct purpose | You have a distinct purpose |

**2. Your purpose is to *A)* be a light bearer and *B)* thereby bring glory to God**

Our ultimate purpose is to bring glory to God, but the mechanism by which we achieve that goal is by letting our light so shine before men. But what does it mean to be a light bearer?

Consider first what a lamp is for. Lamps (or candles or torches or lighthouses) are inherently selfless objects. A lamp doesn’t give off light for its own benefit, but for the benefit of others. A lamp does not serve its own self-interests by shining; rather it serves the interests of its surroundings. A lamp is not an end; it is a means to an end. The end (or goal) is lighting up a room. The purpose of a lamp is not in self-service, but in serving the surrounds.

Consider also why Christ came to earth. *“I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness*” (John 12:46). There wasn’t a single element of selfishness in Christ coming to this earth. Christ came to serve, not to be served (Matt 20:28). He is the ultimate example of sacrificing self in the interests of others (Cf. Phil 2:1-11). This stands in stark contrast with the general attitude of the Pharisees and scribes who (although they did many acts of righteousness) ultimately do all their works to be seen by men (Matt 23:5-7).

Therefore, we can see the specific purpose Christ has given us. Let us seek to live lives of service to God and others as we abide in the Kingdom of God.

*Daniel Smith*

**Murder, Adultery, Retaliation**

**Matthew 5:20-42**

When a heart is filled with anger

* Jewish leaders had taught about the seriousness of murder
  + Matthew 5:20f; 23:1-36; Exodus 20:13; Leviticus 24:17
* Christ expounded on the dangers associated with anger
  + Matthew 5:21f; Proverbs 29:11; Ecclesiastes 7:9
* God teaches that anger doesn't always constitute sin
  + Matt. 5:22; Eph. 4:26,27,30; James 1:19f
* Uncontrolled indignation is in danger of judgment
  + Matt.5:22; I John 3:12-15,20; 4:7f
* It is impossible to worship God with this heart
  + Matt.5:23-26; Col.3:8

When a heart is filled with lust

* God’s marriage laws requires fidelity to one’s spouse in life
  + Genesis 2:18-25; Matthew 19:1-6; Rom.7:1-3
* Jesus took this matter to a higher level with lustful looks
  + Matthew 5:27f; James 1:13-15; Proverbs 23:7
* It is important for those who deal with lust to control it
  + I Thessalonians 4:4; I Cor. 6:19f; II Matthew 5:29f
* Unfaithful mates destroy themselves & their families
  + Matt. 5:30-32; 19:1-10; Mk. 10:1-12; II Sam.11:1ff
* The heart must be brought into subjection to God
  + I Cor.9:27; Psalm 127:1; Eph. 5:22-31; Mark 10:9

When a heart is filled with reprisal

* An idea of “getting even with evildoers” is a worldly agenda
  + Matthew 5:38; 14:1-8; Acts 5:33; 23:12
* Jesus taught that God wants man to *“turn the other cheek”*
  + Matthew 5:39f; I Peter 2:20-23; Isaiah 53:1-12
* It doesn't teach that Christians can’t defend themselves
  + Luke 11:21; I Timothy 5:8; Romans 13:1-7; Jude 3
* This simply means that saints must go the extra mile
  + Matthew 5:41,42; Luke 6:31; I Thessalonians 5:15
* God holds all parties accountable for their actions
  + Romans 12:17-19; II Corinthians 5:10; Matthew 12:36

*Kevin Key*

**Love your neighbour, and your enemies**

**Matthew 5:43-48**

A life driven by love

* The N.T. Scripture both asserts & affirms that God is love
  + I John 4:7; John 3:16f; Romans 5:7f
* Love must be expressed & demonstrated by Christians
  + Luke 6:31; I John 2:6; I Corinthians 13:13
* Confession & submission are vital in our love for God
  + I John 4:19; Matt. 10:32f; Rom. 10:10; Jn. 14:15
* God wants Christians to love one another & others
  + I Pet.2:17; Rom.12:10; Ephesians 5:22ff; Pro.17:17
* Jesus spoke directly about neighbors & enemies
  + Matthew 5:43-48; 22:39; Gal. 5:4; Luke 6:27; Rom.12:14

A love for our fellowman

* God’s people do well by getting to “know their neighbors”
  + Hebrews 13:2; Mk.16:15f
* Every person represents a *“neighbor”* for saints to love
  + Luke 10:25-37; Rom. 13:8
* Christians are to love their neighbor as they love self
  + Mark 12:30,31; James 2:8
* One who loves his neighbor speaks truth with him
  + Ephesians 4:25; II Cor.8:21
* Meeting a person’s needs is loving a neighbor
  + Galatians 6:10; Romans 15:2

A love without limitations

* God certainly realizes the difficulties of “loving” every person
  + Psa. 14:1; I Cor. 1:18-22; Matt.5:45; John 3:17; Rom.5:7f
* Human nature leads people to despise their enemies
  + Ex. 14:14; 23:22; Rom.12:17-19; Luke 23:34
* The Word tells saints to love those who *“hate them”*
  + Matt.5:43; Lk.6:27-37; Proverbs 16:7
* Love does not *“rejoice”* when one’s enemies fall
  + Pro. 24:17; Romans 10:1
* Christians ought to pray for ways to show love
  + Romans 12:14,20

*Kevin Key*

**Public Selves, Private Selves**

**Matthew 6:1-18**

When you do charitable deeds

* They were following the examples set forth by Jesus Christ
  + Acts 10:38; Matt. 9:35
* They were complying with God’s commands to help others
  + Galatians 6:10; Titus 2:7-9
* They were not supposed to do this to receive man’s praise
  + Matthew 6:1,2; Colossians 3:23
* They were to avoid the prideful mistakes of the hypocrites
  + Matthew 6:3; II Peter 2:15; James 4:6
* They were promised a heavenly reward for secret deeds
  + Matthew 6:4; Romans 2:16; I Corinthians 9:17

When you go before God in prayer

* They were informed to pray to the Father through Jesus
  + Matthew 6:5-15; John 17:1-21; I Thessalonians 5:17
* They were told to put a lot of thought into their prayers
  + I John 3:22; 5:14; James 1:5; 4:3; Matt. 6:7
* They were commanded not to sin as the hypocrites
  + Matthew 6:5; 23:5,28; James 3:4ff
* They were ordered to approach God respectably
  + Matthew 6:9; John 16:23f
* They were assured a reward for obeying God
  + I Jn. 3:22; Matt.6:8

When you fast for spiritual focus

* They were fasting to help them stay focused on our God
  + Matthew 9:14f
* They were told not to fast as a way to flaunt their faith
  + Matthew 4:1-10
* They were advised not to allow others to see them
  + Matthew 6:17
* They were to realize the dangers of pridefulness
  + Matthew 6:16
* They were promised a reward for this devotion
  + Matthew 6:18

*Kevin Key*

**Health, Wealth, Happiness**

**Matthew 6:19-34**

The pursuit of real happiness

* God wants mankind to live in happiness & peace
  + Psalm 34:4; Phil. 4:4
* Souls of the world buy into money & materialism
  + Luke 16:1-14; Matthew 13:22
* Christians invest their hope in Christ & heaven
  + I Corinthians 15:19; Matt. 7:24-29
* Our Savior provides instructions & examples
  + Matthew 6:19-34; 17:1-5; I Jn.2:6

The hearts of treasure seekers

* Christ speaks explicitly about laying *“up treasures”*
  + Matthew 6:19,20; II Corinthians 4:18
* Earthly treasures aren’t designed to last forever
  + Matthew 6:19,20; II Peter 3:10ff; I John 2:15-17
* Improper desires for money controls people
  + I Timothy 6:10; II Timothy 4:10; Ecclesiastes 5:10
* Lovers of money have a divided loyalty
  + Matthew 6:24; James 5:1-3; Hebrews 13:5; Matt.16:26

The focus on God’s kingdom

* Jesus identifies that the Gentiles seek these things
  + Matthew 6:30,32; Ephesians 2:11-18
* Seeking God’s kingdom & righteousness is vital
  + Matt. 6:33a;16:18; Acts 2:47; 20:28; I Cor.15:24
* God takes care of those who comply with this
  + Matthew 6:32,33b; 7:11; Luke 12:24; Philippians 4:19
* Tackle each day’s troubles with God’s help
  + Hebrews 4:16; 13:6; Pro.3:5f; Romans 8:28; Matt.7:7

*Kevin Key*

**Judging**

**Matthew 7:1-6**

Things people believe and say about judging others

* It is sinful for Christians to exercise judgment on others
  + I Corinthians 6:2
* Only God is equipped to execute righteous judgment
  + Psalm 7:11; John 7:24
* God will judge people by their judgment on mankind
  + Matthew 6:1; I Corinthians 5:10
* Christians who judge men do not love as God loves
  + I Jn.4:7f; Hebrews 12:5-11; Rom.11:22

Those of whom God commands Christians to judge

* A judgment of oneself on a daily basis
  + Matt. 7:2; II Corinthians 13:5; I Cor.2:15
* A judgment of every soul outside of Christ
  + I Corinthians 6:2; II Corinthians 10:11
* A judgment of false teachings for their doctrine
  + II Timothy 4:1-4; I John 4:1f; Matthew 15:8f
* A judgment of brethren whenever they return to sin
  + Matthew 18:15-21; Gal. 6:1f; II Thess. 3:6-15

There are several critical things to consider in judging

* One must have his own life right before judging others
  + Matthew 7:5; Romans 2:3
* One must never judge people on their appearance
  + John 7:24; James 2:1-12
* One must establish his judgment based on facts
  + Luke 6:31; Matthew 12:36,37
* One must employ God’s word as the standard
  + Romans 2:16; II Timothy 3:16f

This judgment must be handled in a proper fashion

* The truth must be spoken in genuine love for the soul
  + Ephesians 4:15f
* The erring saint must be approached in meekness
  + Galatians 6:1-3
* The Christian must pray fervently for open hearts
  + I Thessalonians 5:17
* The Lord’s will must never be compromised
  + John 14:15; 15:14

The goals for this judgment are defined in scripture

* Erring brethren are disciplined for the sake of all souls
  + I Corinthians 5:1-11; II Thessalonians 3:14f
* Alien sinners are judged to convict & convert them
  + John 16:8; Romans 10:17; Acts 2:16-41; 26:27-29
* Judgment is cast upon false teachers to expose
  + Romans 16:17; Matthew 7:15f; Col.2:8; II John 9-11
* God is glorified through righteous judgment
  + I Chron.16:33; Matthew 5:14-16; II Thess. 1:3-10

*Kevin Key*

**The way to Christ**

**Matthew 7:7-23**

There’s many religions

* Our world is filled with thousands of religious believers
  + Acts 17:16-34
* The term *“Christian”* is ignorantly being misapplied
  + Acts 4:12; 11:26
* Idolatrous doctrines are advancing world-wide
  + Col. 3:5; I Jn.5:21
* God is not pleased with religious division
  + I Corinthians 1:10f

There’s only one way

* God established His plan of redemption in Jesus Christ
  + John 3:16f; Matthew 17:1-5; Ephesians 1:3-7; Hebrews 10:26
* The pathway to eternal life is a straight & narrow road
  + Psalm 37:23; Matthew 7:13; John 10:9; 14:6; Luke 13:24
* Satan offers a wide & broad way to eternal torment
  + Proverbs 14:12; Matthew 7:14; Jeremiah 10:23
* Only a few will find the correct way to salvation
  + Matt. 22:1-14; I Pet. 3:20,21; Mk.16:16

There’s false prophets

* Souls with itching ears heap up to themselves teachers
  + II Timothy 4:3f; Acts 20:28-30; Titus 1:11-14
* These people disguise themselves as N.T. Christians
  + Matthew 7:15a; II Corinthians 11:14; John 8:44
* In actuality these religionist are *“ravenous wolves”*
  + Matthew 7:15b; 10:16; I Peter 5:8; John 10:1-10
* Unwise souls are drawn away by these people
  + Galatians 1:6-9; 3:1; 5:4; Hebrews 2:1-4; Eph.5:18

There’s the judgment

* Not every believer *“shall enter the kingdom of heaven”*
  + Matthew 7:21; James 2:19
* People of other faiths do some really amazing works
  + Matthew 7:22; Titus 1:16; I Corinthians 15:2
* There is more to it than sticking Jesus’ name on it
  + Colossians 3:17; Colossians 2:9; Matthew 28:18
* Christ will declare, *“I never knew you; depart…”*
  + Matthew 7:23; 22:16; Rom.10:10; II Timothy 2:19

There’s Biblical reasons

* They have not been Scripturally immersed into Christ
  + Gal. 3:26f; Rom. 6:1-7
* They were never added by the Lord into His church
  + Acts 2:38-41,47; 11:24
* They engage in a manmade practice of worship
  + John 4:23f; Matthew 15:8f
* They are not in fellowship with Jehovah God
  + I John 1:3-10; Acts 2:42

**The Two Builders**

**Matthew 7:24-27**

My father was a builder in his early life, but in reality all men are builders. Jesus speaks of two builders who represent all the adults in the world. To live is to build – every thought, word, and deed is laid in place and gradually the structure of the life arises. “Sow a thought and reap a deed; sow a deed and reap a habit; sow a habit and reap a character; sow a character and reap a destiny”.

There are many similarities between the two builders of whom Jesus spoke. They had the same desire – to build a house. They built in the same locality and the same stressors and tests came their way. Jesus said nothing about style or décor and we could picture them as being two similar-looking houses side-by-side in the same street.

But there was a fundamental difference between the two houses. However, if we were to drive by and see both builders out the front of their houses mowing their lawns we wouldn’t notice any basic difference. But we must see the difference otherwise Jesus’ illustration has no value. The difference was in the foundation – one “digged deep” (Luke 6:48,49) but the other took the quick and cheap option. It is faster and easier and cheaper to smooth out a piece of sand than to dig deep for rock.

As with two men and two houses on the same street, two disciples can have similarities. Both can listen to the words of Jesus in the assembly and both can have the same basic desires such as the forgiveness of sins, peace, removal of guilt, comfort, guidance, and eternal life. But one may be prepared to pay the price while the other may not. The foolish builder is the nominal Christian.

We have two questions to face: the first is “Am I wise or foolish?” How do I feel about the sermon on the mount? Good? Bad? Too difficult? Idealistic but not practical? Jesus says “Whoever hears these sayings of mine and does them” – so He has the beatitudes in mind; He has teaching about killing, adultery, hating, vengeance and swearing in mind. He has teaching about giving, praying, fasting, and forgiveness in mind. He has teaching about laying up treasure on earth, worrying, putting the kingdom first in mind. He has teaching about being critical, constant in prayer and the golden rule in mind. In short, what constitutes the authority in my life? What determines my attitude and actions? Is it my will or the Lord’s will? Is it the philosophy of men or Scripture?

The second question is “How will my work be tested?” Both the Bible and human experience testify that everything gets tested in life. Jesus never intimated that becoming a Christian would mean the end of trials and tribulations. “Into each life a little rain must fall” goes the line of a song. Things like illness, loss, disappointment, grief and old age. Things like wars, natural disasters, divorce, cancer, persecution. Things like winds of change, doubt, false doctrine, attacks on the faith. The real question then is ‘How do I stand up to these things?’ How do we face disappointment-disease-depression-despair-death? Do we have a foundation of rock that enables us to stand under pressure? A ship may look fine and stately lying at anchor in the harbour, but the real test comes out in the ocean in the storm. Am I laying a foundation that will support me when the evil days come?

And, of course, the greatest test will be that of judgment day. Everything will be tested on that day – humanism, hedonism, atheism, Hinduism, Mohamedism, and every other ism. Even the Kingdom will be tested and that which is offensive in the kingdom will be cast out. Only that which is built upon the rock of Jesus Christ, the only Saviour and Mediator, the only one to have conquered death and ascended to rule at the Father’s right hand, will stand on the day He will return to receive His own.

*Ian Coker*

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