

Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5:1-20

Session One

Overview

The Gospel of Matthew was written about AD 80-90 after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. The target audience seems to be Jews, and the purpose apparently is to show that Jesus fulfilled prophecies of the coming Messiah. The Sermon on the Mount is a collection of Jesus' teachings and a source of spiritual and moral instruction. The sermon contains many of the central tenets of Christianity. This course will take a closer look at the sermon in an attempt to apply its teachings to contemporary life. Giving our belief that the Bible is the Living Word that is still speaking to us, we contend that many of the demands of the sermon are not to be understood literally. Rather, these teachings of Jesus are concerned with inward disposition. The underlying meanings hold relevance for all generations.

In its original context, the sermon "is directed to the disciples and through them to the whole church today" (Bible Gateway, Reformation Study Bible). According to the Reformation Study Bible, the "sermon addresses both inward motives and outward conduct ([5:21](#), [22](#), [27](#), [28](#)). These legitimate demands are so strict ([5:48](#)) that no one can completely obey them, and we are therefore driven to the grace and mercy of God. In some cases Jesus uses obviously intentional exaggeration to illustrate the absolute requirements of God's law ([5:29](#), [30](#))".

The Sermon on the Mount takes place early in Jesus' ministry. Shortly after being baptized, the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness where he fasted and prayed for forty days and forty nights. The tempter came to Jesus in the desert, just after the fast when Jesus was hungry. Jesus resisted the devil's temptations and sent the tempter away, "Away with you, Satan!" Jesus said. "For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" (Matthew 4:10, NKJV). Scripture tells that the devil left Jesus after that and "angels came and ministered to Him" (v. 11). Jesus traveled to the Galilee region and began to preach a message of repentance: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (v. 17).

General Educational Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, participants should be able to:

- Demonstrate basic understanding of Bible teachings.
- Utilize outside resources (i.e., dictionaries, commentaries, concordances, etc.) for gaining new insights.
- Analyze biblical contexts.
- Reflect critically on contemporary life in light of biblical principles.
- Implement strategies for change in contemporary life using biblical principles as a conceptual framework.

General Questions

1. What was the intent of the scripture for the original hearers?
2. What were the major themes of this scripture?
3. What insights, challenges, or new directions did this scripture suggest for you?
4. Describe at least one way this scripture applies to contemporary Christian life.

Possible Resources

During class preparation, participants may wish to use one or more of the following excellent free resources available on the Internet. These resources are very helpful in providing information that will round out your knowledge base.

- [Bible Atlas](#)
- [Bible Dictionary](#) (from Bible Gateway)
- [Bible Gateway](#)
- [Biblical Names](#) (through Wikipedia)
- [Concise New Testament Survey](#)
- [Concise Old Testament Survey](#)
- [Crosswalk Bible Reference Tools](#)

Beatitudes - Matthew 5:1-11

Setting/Circumstances

Jesus has just recruited four disciples: Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Accompanied by these disciples and others who followed him, Jesus began to teach in the synagogues, preach the gospel of the kingdom, and heal all kinds of sickness and disease among the people. Scripture tells us that “Great multitudes followed Him—from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan” (v. 25).

Audience

Jesus observed the multitudes and used the occasion as a teachable moment. “He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them” (5:1-2). Jesus sat down while he was teaching (compare with the Sermon on the Plain in [Luke 4:20](#), [Luke 6](#)). This was the typical posture of revered Jewish teachers (Kirk, 195, p. 175). One commentary surmises that the writer Matthew envisions the audience consisting of several disciples along with the crowd that followed him on his journey. The disciples represent “the church,” and the “crowd” represents potential disciples who “overheard” Jesus’ teachings (Kirk, 1995, p. 175). The subject matter of the sermon is covered in the following sections of this lesson.

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-11, NRSV)

Read aloud from Bible

Themes

- Blessed
- Poor in Spirit
- Those who mourn

- The meek
- Those who hunger for righteousness
- Peacemakers
- Inherit the earth
- Shall see God

Then and Now

1. As shown above, interpretations of “Blessed” include spiritual well-being, having the approval of God, and thus a happier destiny. How do these principles of blessedness apply to the modern day?
2. Who are today’s “poor in spirit”? Scripture says in v3, “For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” What does it mean to be “poor in spirit” in the modern day? In what ways does the gospel message give them access to the Kingdom of Heaven?
3. Apply the message from verse 8 to the modern day. “Blessed *are* the pure in heart, For they shall see God.”

Salt and Light - Matthew 5:13-16

Read from Bible

General Questions

1. What was the intent of the scripture for the original hearers?
The primary value of salt was not as a flavoring but as a preservative. Disciples are to hinder the world’s corruption. The salt deposits along the Dead Sea contain not just sodium chloride but a variety of other minerals as well. This salt can become good for nothing when the rain washes out its saltiness over the years (Bible Gateway Commentaries, Reformation Study Bible).
2. Read and reflect on Isaiah 60:1-3 (NKJV) Compare the use of light in Matthew 5:14-16 with the images of light in the Isaiah passage. What is a major principle disciples should learn from these scriptures?

The Gentiles Bless Zion

Arise, shine;
 For your light has come!
 And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.
² For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth,
 And deep darkness the people;
 But the LORD will arise over you,
 And His glory will be seen upon you.
³ The Gentiles shall come to your light,
 And kings to the brightness of your rising.

Then and Now

1. What insights, challenges, or new directions did this scripture suggest for you?
2. Describe at least one way the concepts of salt and light apply to contemporary Christian discipleship.

Law and Prophets - Matthew 5:17-20

Read from the Bible.

Setting/Circumstances/Audience

The “Law or the Prophets” is a way of referring to the Old Testament teachings. Jesus announces to those in the crowd (who might those people be?) that he has not come to abolish but to fulfill the scripture. It is important that, in fulfilling the law, “Jesus does not alter, replace, or nullify the former commands; rather, He establishes their true intent and purpose in His teaching and accomplishes them in His obedient life. The Law, as well as the Prophets, points forward to Christ” (Bible Gateway Commentaries, Reformation Study Bible). The meaning of the gospel writer’s words “until all is accomplished” refers to the “full manifestation of God’s kingdom” (Bible Gateway Commentaries, Reformation Study Bible).

Themes

In verse 20, Jesus says, “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.” One commentary states: “Jesus did not criticize the Pharisees for their strict observance of the law but for their emphasis on outward conformity to it without a proper inner attitude” (Bible Gateway Commentaries, Reformation Study Bible). The Pharisees paid close attention to the letter of the law and often missed its underlying demands for grace and dependence on God.

General Questions

1. What were the major themes of this passage of scripture?
2. What insights, challenges, or new directions does this scripture suggest for you?
3. Describe at least one way this scripture applies to contemporary Christian life.