

St. Matthew

Chapter 5

The Sermon on the Mount (5-7)

The first of five sections of Jesus teaching in the Gospel of Matthew is the Sermon on the Mount. The sermon extends three chapters. In this sermon Jesus lays down the foundation for those teachings which are to follow. Of this sermon Kretzmann says,

This section of Matthew's Gospel included in chapters 5-7 is one of the most beautiful and impressive in the entire New Testament. In the simplest language, but with singular force and pertinency Jesus here gave a summary of His moral teaching, the doctrine "of fruits and good works of a Christian," as Luther writes. For the Sermon on the Mount is not the proclamation of the Gospel, but preaching of the Law. To awaken and promote the realization and the sense, not only comparative weakness and insufficiency in spiritual matters, but of a total and utter inability to think and speak and act in conformity with the holy will of God; to bring about humiliating, but incidentally the most blessed conviction as to one's being wretched, and miserable, and naked in spiritual things [Revelation 3:17]; and to teach the regenerated that without Him we can do nothing, and thus lead them on the way of true sanctification: that was the object of Christ in delivering this wonderful sermon.



Hillside in Galilee

Kretzmann might go too far when He says that the Sermon on the Mount is not a preaching of the Gospel, for this sermon, like the Old Testament, does contain the gift of the promise of the forgiveness of sins.

Perhaps we can best understand the Sermon on the Mount as Jesus' teaching on the Old Testament. In His temptation Jesus establishes the authority of the prophets by quoting them, especially Moses and his sermon in Deuteronomy. Now, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is unfolding the true understanding of the Old Testament, and in doing so He does (at least) these two things:

- 1) Jesus shows His own connection to the Old Testament. The Old Testament is, after all, His own words. Jesus is the "Word" who has spoken to His people throughout time, and these words He comes not to destroy but to fulfill [5:17]. When Jesus says, "You have heard it said... but I say to you," He is not contradicting the Old Testament, but explaining what He meant when He spoke it the first time. So after hearing this sermon the people are astonished, "for He taught them as one having authority." [7:29]
- 2) Jesus is tearing the Scriptures out of the hands of those who had misused and mis-taught them for their own advantage, namely the Pharisees. These are they who would say, "We have Abraham; we have Moses; we have the Torah." But Jesus is here, the kingdom is come, the proud are cast down and the humble are exalted. "Talk no more so very proudly; let no

arrogance come from your mouth, for the LORD is the God of knowledge; and by Him actions are weighed... Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, and those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.” [1 Samuel 2:3,5]

So Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, gives a true understanding of Moses and the Old Testament, and in so doing He continues to overthrow the devil's kingdom which had been established in the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees.

The Beatitudes (5:1-12)

This first sermon of Jesus recorded for us in Matthew sets the tone for the entire Gospel, and these first words set the tone for this sermon. Jesus is teaching about His kingdom, the Gospel and good news of His kingdom. The beatitudes are descriptions (or better, promises) of what happens in this kingdom, for the kingdom of God puts everything on its head. In the kingdom the mighty are put from their thrones and the humble are exalted [Luke 1:52, *the Magnificent*]. In the kingdom the first are last and the last are first. In the kingdom to be glorified is to be lifted up in the shame of the cross.

It is important, then, that we understand the beatitudes as promises of God's grace and mercy. Here is Edersheim:

The promises attaching, for example, to the so-called “Beatitudes: must not be regarded as the *reward* of the spiritual state with which they are respectively connected, nor yet as their result. It is not *because* a man is poor in spirit that his is the Kingdom of Heaven, in the sense that the one state will grow into the other, or be its result; still less is one the reward of the other. The connecting link- so to speak the theological copula between the 'state' and the promise- is in each case Christ Himself: because He stands between our present and our future, and 'has opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.' Thus the promise represents the gift of grace by Christ in the new Kingdom. [The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, I.529]

Thus Jesus is placed in the midst of each of the beatitudes; He is the hinge between our humility and heaven's glory. It is not the poorness of spirit that earns the kingdom of heaven, but Jesus who gives to the poor that which they do not have. So the beatitudes are not natural, their promises are not disconnected from faith and their rewards are not severed from the kingdom of heaven.

Martin Franzmann states it thus:

[Jesus] stands before His disciples as the Giver. He is the Messianic Giver. Nine times He calls His disciples “blessed” (5:3-11); that word occurs four times in Matthew outside the Beatitudes, and in all cases it describes man in his relationship to the Messiah- blessed is

"The Sermon on the Mount" by Gustave Doré

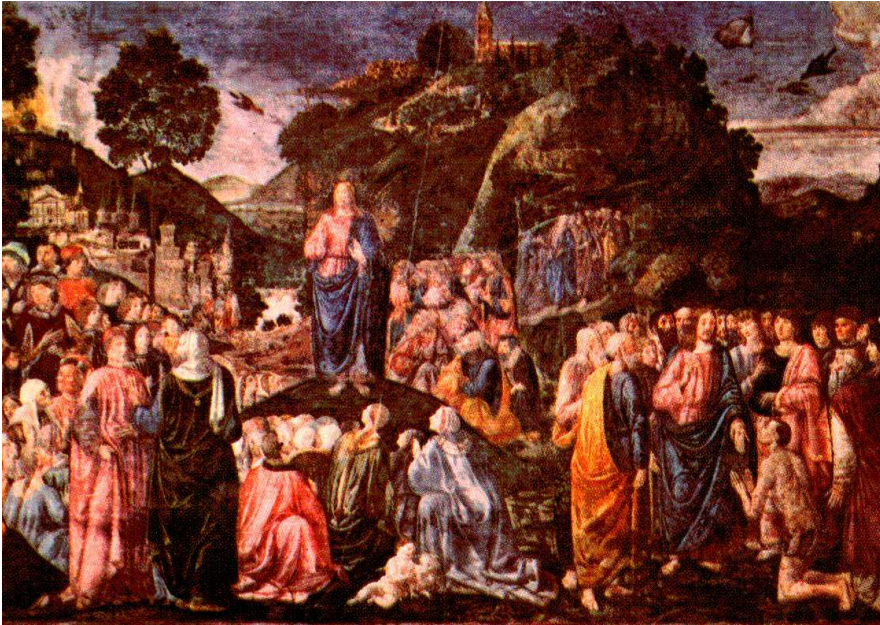


Doré Bible Illustrations • Free to Copy
www.creationism.org/images/

Mat 5:7-10 Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. ...
Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: ...

the man who is not offended at the lowliness of the ministering Messiah (11:6); blessed are the eyes which see in Jesus of Nazareth, in the Sower who goes out to sow, the coming of the reign of God (13:16,17); blessed in Simon because the Father has revealed the Messiah to him (16:17); blessed is the servant whom the returning Messiah finds faithful at his post (24:46). As Messianic Giver He gives absolutely, into emptiness. [*Follow Me: Discipleship According to Saint Matthew, 36*]

The beatitudes are fit for a lifetime of study and meditation. Instead of discussing each in turn, we will only make a few observations.



Blessed. This is a marvelous first word; in it we hear of Jesus' purpose. "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." [*John 3:17*] 'Blessed' is the first word spoken to Adam and Eve, "He blessed them and said..." It is the last word spoken in our liturgy, "The Lord bless you and keep you." It is a word that indicates that a gift is being given.

'Blessed' is also the very first word in the Psalms, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law

(Torah) of the LORD." [*Psalms 1:1,2*] The blessing of the Torah, the Law, Jesus is now giving out Himself. All of the Old Testament blessings and promises are here in the person of Jesus. "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us." [*2 Corinthians 1:20*]

Is and Shall Be. Notice that the promise of the first and last of the beatitudes is in the present tense (*is* the kingdom of heaven), while all the others are future (*shall be* comforted, filled, etc.). The kingdom of heaven is not a far away, distant dream, but a present reality. The preaching of John the Baptist was not, "The kingdom of heaven is far away," but rather, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." Why? Because Jesus is at hand. Where He is His kingdom is. So the poor in spirit have the kingdom of heaven because they, by faith, have Christ who does not despise our poverty, but makes Himself poor that we might be rich. [*2 Corinthians 8:9*]

Righteousness. Here Jesus introduces a major theme of His teaching. Already in His baptism Jesus had compelled John by saying, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." [*Matthew 3:15*] Now the theme of righteousness is taken up again, and will weave throughout the Sermon. "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." [*Matthew 5:20*]

There are two types of righteousness: active and passive. Active righteousness is our own keeping of the law. It is a matter of works. Passive righteousness is the gift of Christ's perfection which is given to us (imputed) through faith. This passive righteousness is also called 'Christian righteousness' (because it alone makes us Christians) and 'alien righteousness' (because it comes from outside of us). This is the righteousness of which St Paul speaks, "But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works." [*Romans 4:5,6*] It is passive righteousness which makes us good and acceptable to God. Active righteousness is the fruit of this gift.

Which type of righteousness is Jesus speaking of when He says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled”? Note that Jesus does not say, “Blessed are those who work and strive for righteousness...” To hunger and thirst means to not have food and water, so to hunger and thirst for righteousness means not having it, otherwise there would be no hunger. This desire for the righteousness which we do not have is the exact opposite of the Pharisees who are full of their own righteousness; they have no hunger or thirst or need for Jesus and His gifts. So Jesus speaks here of passive, alien, Christian righteousness, that which comes as a gift.

Humility. “New Testament humility is really despair of self.” (Edersheim, I.528) This is what Jesus is teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Just like traveling into the midst of the Rocky Mountains produces an immediate sense of finite weakness, so traveling through this Sermon on the Mount gives us humility, that is, despair of self. Here the law of God, and more, the gifts of Jesus, tower so high that there is no room for pride.

Thus the first four beatitudes are a unit, they belong together, for the those who are poor, mourning, meek and hungry are the same, they are the humble to whom the kingdom comes. The last four beatitudes also belong together, for they have in view the works that are brought forth by the arrival of the kingdom, the fruits that come out of the tree made good. The disciples who takes up their cross to follow Jesus reflect the Master that they follow: merciful, pure, peacemakers who are persecuted like the prophets. This is one of the indelible marks of a prophet, and a Christian: they are persecuted.

Salt and Light (5:13-16)

The Good Works of the Lord's Disciples. Those to whom the Lord gives His gifts are never the same. Such mercy and love and forgiveness is too bountiful; it overflows, it must. Jesus' disciples are then the doers of good works. Jesus describes this with two metaphors: salt and light. Salt flavors and light illuminates, it can do nothing else. What it does is bound up into what it is. Salt without saltiness is sand, light without light is darkness, faith without works is dead.

Here we remember Luther's definition of faith:

Faith is a divine work in us that transforms us and begets us anew from God, kills the Old Adam, makes us entirely different people in heart, spirit, mind, and all our powers, and brings the Holy Spirit with it. Oh, faith is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, so that it is impossible for it not to be constantly doing what is good. Likewise, faith does not ask if good works are to be done, but before one can ask, faith has already done them and is constantly active. Whoever does not preform such good works is a faithless man, blindly tapping around in search of faith and good works without knowing what either faith or good works are, and in the meantime he chatters and jabbars a great deal about faith and good works. Faith is a vital, deliberate trust in God's grace, so certain that it would die a thousand times for it.

And such confidence and knowledge of divine grace makes us joyous, mettlesome and merry toward God and all creatures. This the Holy Spirit works by faith, and therefore without any coercion a man is willing and desirous to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything for the love of God and to His glory, who has been so gracious to him. It is therefore as impossible to separate works from faith as it is to separate heat and light from fire.” [Introduction to Romans, quoted from the *Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, IV.10-12*]



Just as Jesus is the “great light” for all who sit in darkness [4:16], so are Jesus' disciples. Notice how our

light shines before men: our good works. No one can see faith in God, but all can see our love for one another and for our neighbor. St Peter teaches the same thing when He says: “Beloved, I bid you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.” [1 Peter 2:11,12] Already here, at the beginning of His teaching to His disciples, Jesus is preparing them to “Go and make disciples of all nations.” [28:19]

Your Father in heaven. This phrase which is used often in Matthew is first used here. The peacemakers are God's sons [9], and God is their Father. The kingdom of God is also the family of God. We are brought into the kingdom as we are born into the family. It is in our baptism that the Father speaks to us, “You are My beloved son.” In His kingdom Jesus is our Master and our Brother, God is our Lord and our Father.

The Law Fulfilled (5:17-48)

To Fulfill the Law and the Prophets. Lest the disciples think that what Jesus is saying is something new, or is meant to cast away the Law and the Prophets, Jesus says, “one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.” The kingdom of heaven is not a throwing off of the Old Testament, nor is the Old Testament, the law or Torah, fulfilled anywhere else but in Jesus. “I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.”

Just as Jesus' baptism fulfills all righteousness, so Jesus' teaching and doing [5:19] fulfills the Law and the Prophets. How? Already that filling up of the Old Testament has begun. Seven prophecies are reported for us in Matthew 1-4. By His birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, second coming, and everything else Jesus is the completion of the Old Testament. [See Luke 24:26-27,44; John 5:39]

Exceeding Righteousness. Thus Jesus is the Righteous One, the kingdom is His. This means that the kingdom is *not* the Pharisees'. Jesus says, “For I say to you, unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” [5:20] Imagine the insult! If anyone thought that their righteousness had merited them the kingdom, it was the Pharisees, but this is not enough, it must be exceeded. All of the boasting of the Pharisee is brought to nothing, and there is no hope but Christ.

Jesus is wresting the kingdom of heaven from those who would enter it with their own righteousness. His sermon continues to unwind the Torah from its false teachers and present it purely. His sermon continues with a pure explanation of the law. The Formula of Concord tells us what Jesus is preaching:

“The mere preaching of the law without Christ either produces presumptuous people, who believe that they can fulfill the law by external works, or drives man utterly to despair. Therefore Christ takes the law into His hands and explains it spiritually [Matthew 5:21ff.; Romans 7:6,14]; thus He reveals His wrath from heaven over all sinners and shows how great this wrath is. This directs sinners to the law, and there he really learns to know his sin, an insight that Moses could never have wrung out of him.”

In the commandments that follow Jesus shows that keeping the law is no mere outward rote obedience to the letter, but rather a matter of the inclination of the heart of man. To insult is to murder [21-26], to lust is to commit adultery [27-30], and likewise to divorce [31-32]. There is no swearing [33-37], no retaliation [38-42], and no hatred, even toward one's enemies [43-47]. The whole discussion is concluded with the monumental command: “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” [48] This is setting the bar high. Throughout the entire chapter, in fact, the bar is continually raised until it reaches this daunting crescendo. The law requires complete and total obedience, and anything else is damnable and worthy of hell-fires.

The scribes and Pharisees had taken the Law too lightly; they had made it manageable, doable. Their monumental body of traditions and oral law had not made the law more difficult (more complicated, perhaps), but in all actuality easier. Under the Pharisees the law is kept by doing; under the kingdom of

heaven the law is kept by repenting; “Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

The medieval theologians had done the same thing with this text. Thomas Aquinas called the Sermon on the Mount “Evangelical Councils” and made a sharp distinction between them and the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were for the normal Christian, and the Evangelical Councils were for the monks and nuns. By following these evangelical councils the monks could not only do enough good works for their own salvation, but also preform works of supererogation, works above perfection that could be given away. This is nothing more than a Pharisaical understanding of the anti-Pharisee teaching of the sermon on the Mount. Against this the Reformers said that the preaching of the Ten Commandments in the Sermon on the Mount is for all people, and Jesus' explanations of the Commandments are enshrined in the Catechism.



Moses is Given the Ten Commandments