

The Greatest Life Ever Lived

A Study in the Incarnate Life of Jesus Christ and An Exposition of the Four Gospels

LESSON XXXVI : THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT — PART I : INTRODUCTION

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	related passages
5:1		6:17-19		

Having spent a night in prayer and having chosen His twelve Apostles, Jesus is again confronted by the crowds. “They came, like the multitudes before them, to hear His word and to see His works. While Matthew’s record seems to indicate that the Lord withdrew from the multitude so as to minister to the twelve apostles privately, Luke’s record makes it clear that Christ found a level place from which He could address a great multitude of disciples.” [Pentecost, *Words and Works*]

Matt 5:1 And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain: and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him:

Lk 6:17-19 And He came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of His disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judaea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear Him, and to be healed of their diseases; and they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch Him: for there went virtue out of Him, and healed them all.

The participants that day were: His newly-chosen Twelve; a huge crowd of other followers, “disciples” in the loose sense of the word; and a vast throng of others with Judea (southern Israel including Jerusalem) and the coastal region of north-west Israel (Tyre and Sidon) being mentioned specifically. This coincides with last week’s lesson, obviously the crowd being not much different than the day prior [see lesson 36].

The crowd’s desire to see Jesus was (generally speaking) two-fold: they wanted to hear Jesus, and they wanted to be healed. “Their desire for a message from His lips did not meet with disappointment, for it was to them and on this very occasion that Jesus addressed words that were bound to live forever, that is, to be repeated over and over again throughout the centuries and in ever so many languages and dialects all over the world.” [Hendriksen, *Luke*]

“*And when He was set* — The usual posture of public teachers among the Jews, and among many other people. Hence sitting was a synonymous term for teaching among the Robbins.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

and the multitude sought to touch Him: as mentioned last week, it was not just Jesus taking the action of touching and consciously healing people but even those who were close enough to touch Him became healed! This accounts for the throng crowding Him to the point of which He desire a small boat present in case He needed to withdraw from the crowd [see lesson 36]. “That is clearly what the passage says, and we should not try to change it to something else. In fact, the truth here expressed is not confined to this single passage. The fact that our Lord at times sense that healing power was proceeding from Him is also expressed in Luke 8:46; cp Mark 5:30. Probably with noble intentions — to guard against magical qualities being attributed to the garments or fingers of Jesus? — some prefer a different rendering for the last part of v19 ... being translated as follows, ‘because *power* was going out from Him *and He was curing everybody.*’ “ [Hendriksen, *Luke*] In conjunction with Hendriksen’s comment is something to be remembered: *many touched Jesus who were not healed* — consider as He was taken and abused during His trial. The soldiers did not jump back from Him claiming they were healed! Jesus at this point was probably thirty-one years old; why is this just now being mentioned? Obviously during His growth to manhood none was healed just by virtue of their touching Him. Was this something which depended entirely upon the faith of the one that touched? Was this a miracle or series of miracles which the Father allowed for a short time then ceased as the cross drew near? Whatever questions remain concerning the verbiage, scriptures clearly teach that even if one was healed by merely touching the garments of Christ, the healing virtue emanated from Christ Himself and not from a magical piece of cloth. **Whether Christ actively healed by placing His hand on a person and pronounced them healed or if He passively healed by allowing others to merely touch Him, the miracle is the same and the Source of the miracle is the same.**

The gospels records Jesus as referring to both the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of heaven (literally, “the kingdom of the heavens”). “Matthew has *kingdom of heaven*, or *of the heavens*, a phrase used by him only, and most frequently employed by Christ himself to describe the kingdom; though Matthew also uses, less frequently, *kingdom of God*. **The two are substantially equivalent terms**, though the *pre-eminent* title was *kingdom of God*, since it was expected to be fully realized in the Messianic era, when God should take upon himself the kingdom by a visible representative. **The phrase *kingdom of Heaven* was common in the Rabbinical writings, and had a double signification: the *historical kingdom* and the *spiritual and moral kingdom*. They very often understood by it *divine worship; adoration of God; the sum of religious duties; but also the Messianic kingdom*. The kingdom of God is, essentially, the absolute dominion of God in the universe, both in a physical and a spiritual sense.** It is ‘an organic commonwealth which has the principle of its existence in the will of God’. It was foreshadowed in the Jewish theocracy. The idea of the kingdom advanced toward clearer definition from Jacob’s prophecy of the Prince out of Judah (Gen 49:10), through David’s prophecy of the everlasting kingdom and the king of righteousness and peace (Ps 22,72), through Isaiah, until, in Daniel, its eternity and superiority over the kingdoms of the world are brought strongly out. For this

kingdom Israel looked with longing, expecting its realization in the Messiah; and while the common idea of the people was narrow, sectarian, Jewish, and political, yet ‘there was among the people a certain consciousness that the principle itself was of universal application’. In Daniel this conception is distinctly expressed (7:14-27; 4:25; 2:44). In this sense it was apprehended by John the Baptist. The ideal kingdom is to be realized in the absolute rule of the eternal Son, Jesus Christ, by whom all things are made and consist (Jn 1:3; Col 1:16-20), whose life of perfect obedience to God and whose sacrificial offering of love upon the cross reveal to men their true relation to God, and whose spirit works to bring them into this relation. The ultimate idea of the kingdom is that of ‘a redeemed humanity.... **This kingdom is both present** (Matt 11:12; 12:28; 16:19; Lk 11:20; 16:16; 17:21; see, also, the parables of the Sower, the Tares, the Leaven, and the Dragnet; and compare the expression ‘theirs, or yours, *is* the kingdom,’ Matt 5:3; Lk 6:20) **and future** (Dan 7:27; Matt 13:43; 19:28; 25:34; 26:29; Mk 9:47; 2 Pet 1:11; 1 Cor 6:9; Rev 20). As a present kingdom it is incomplete and in process of development. It is expanding in society like the grain of mustard seed (Matt 13:31,32); working toward the pervading of society like the leaven in the lump (Matt 13:33). God *is* in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, and the Gospel of Christ is the great instrument in that process (2 Cor 5:19,20). The kingdom develops from within outward under the power of its essential divine energy and law of growth, which insures its progress and final triumph against all obstacles.... The consummation is described in Rev 21, 22.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

General observations concerning the Sermon on the Mount:

- the time was probably Spring of 28 AD. Jesus was at the Passover (debated; see lessons 33,34), traveled back to Galilee during which time there occurred several Sabbath controversies (see lesson 35), chose the twelve apostles after a night in prayer (see lesson 36), and now, as Spurgeon describes it, “The King Proclaims Formally the Laws of His Kingdom.”
- There is a minor synoptic problem with Matthew saying the sermon taking place upon a mountain while Luke is saying it was on a plain (or “level place”). The supposed problem disappears however when we consider it may have been a level place or plain upon a mountain. Another possibility is that Jesus was below on a plain healing (Luke’s account) but upon seeing the multitude He ascended higher to teach (Matthew’s account).
- The Sermon is probably a single sermon rather than a collection of accounts since both Matthew and Luke’s account begin with “And He opened His mouth and began to teach them saying... “ (Matt 5:2; Lk 6:20) and ends with “Now when Jesus had finished these sayings... “ (Matt 7:28; Lk 7:1).
- It is generally accepted that both Matthew and Luke is recording the same event (This is not universally accepted. E.g., “Upon the whole, I am disposed to think that the preponderance of evidence is on the side of [Matthew’s and Luke’s accounts] being different discourses delivered at a considerable distance of time from each other.”; Brown, *Sayings and Discourses of Christ*). The historical settings are the same, and the train of thought is to a considerable extent the same in both: the beatitudes, the law of love, the parable of the two builders. “It is admitted, nevertheless, that the two reports are by no means identical. In fact Matthew’s coverage is more than three times as extensive as Luke’s. This shows that the Gospel writers were not mere copyists. Each wrote in accordance with his own background, character, and endowment. Perhaps even more important: each wrote in harmony with his own specific purpose. Thus it is not surprising that Matthew includes various matters that were of special interest to his *Jewish* readers whom he was trying to reach for Christ. Since Luke was not primarily writing for Jews he omits such matters. On the other hand Luke’s account contains material not found in that identical form in Matthew.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] Accepting this however does not preclude the fact that Jesus often did repeat Himself and the teaching found here was undoubtedly taught at other times in other places.
- Some make connections between the Sermon on the Mount with Mt. Horeb where Moses received the law. “The mountain itself cannot be identified. Delitzsch calls the Mount of Beatitudes ‘The Sinai of the New Testament.’ “ [Vincent, *Word Studies*] “We will not designate the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ as the promulgation of the New Law, since that would be a far too narrow, if not erroneous, view of it. But it certainly seems to correspond to the Divine Revelation in the ‘Ten Words’ from Mount Sinai.... It opens with ten Beatitudes, which are the NT counterpart to the Ten Commandments. These present to us, not the observance of the Law written on stone, but the realization of that Law which, by the Spirit, is written on the fleshly tables of the heart.” [Edersheim, *Life of Messiah*]

<i>Mount Horeb</i>	<i>Sermon on the Mount</i>
cold, bleak, barren, almost inaccessible, situated in the midst of a howling wilderness with its fiery serpents	smiling landscapes and grassy slopes, as if welcoming those who came
God appeared in thunder and lightning, and the people were overcome with fear	Emmanuel appeared by sitting among His disciples who are listening without fear or trembling, teaching grace and truth

“Yet we must be careful. Although it is true that from Mt. Horeb Jehovah revealed His greatness and His glory, nevertheless *the law was given in a context of love* (see Ex 20:2; Dt 5:2,3,6,28,29,32,33; 6:3-5). Also, what was proclaimed at Sinai is not set aside but is given its deeply spiritual interpretation by Jesus Christ (cp Mt 5:17).” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] Although it makes for an interesting comparison, I am not convinced this was foremost in the

Lord's mind when the Sermon on the mount was given, and the number of beatitudes is subject to debate.

- “The sermon itself is well organized. This is true with respect to *all* the reported discourses of our Lord. Let preachers take note of this in making *their* sermons. **Jesus never rambled.** He chose a *theme*. In the present case that theme is obviously “*the gospel of the kingdom*”.... The sermon also has well-defined divisions or ‘points’. These are not stiff or formal — ‘the bones do not stick out’ — but organic, so that one subdivision gradually develops into, or merges with, another.

- First Jesus speaks about *the citizens of the kingdom* (Matt 5:2-16), describing *their character and blessedness* (v2-12) and their relation to the world (v13-16). They are the salt of the earth, the light of the world.

- Secondly the Lord sets forth *the righteousness of the kingdom*, the high standard of life demanded by the King (Matt 5:17-7:12). We are shown that this righteousness is in full accord with the moral principles enunciated in the OT (5:17-19), but is not in accord with the current and traditional (rabbinical) *interpretation and application* of God's holy law (v20-48).... The essence of righteousness of the kingdom with respect to man's relation *to God* amounts to this: ‘Love God above all’ (Matt 6).... The essence of the righteousness of the kingdom with respect to man's relation *to man* is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matt 7:1-12)....

- Thirdly Jesus concludes His sermon with an earnest *exhortation to enter the kingdom* (Matt 7:13-27).”
[Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

- A word about a couple misinterpretations concerning the Sermon on the Mount: (a) *it is not the gospel*. Some take a liberal “social gospel” view which teaches all man must do is live the Sermon on the Mount and everything will be alright with his soul, war will be banished and man will live in peace. After two world wars however this teaching has faded in popularity. (b) *it is not for the kingdom age only*. Some who take an extreme view on dispensations take this to be for the Jewish kingdom which failed to come due to the Jews’ rejection of Christ. It is therefore on hold during this present church age and will again become relevant during the millennium. The error of this will become clear as we go through the Sermon. “There is no teaching to be found in the Sermon on the Mount which is not also found in the various NT epistles. Make a list of the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount; then read your epistles. You will find that the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is there also.... **It is something which is meant for all Christian people. It is a perfect picture of the life of the kingdom of God.**” [Lloyd-Jones, *Sermon on Mount*]

I cannot properly begin an exposition of the Sermon on the Mount without adding these comments from Martin Lloyd-Jones:

“Nothing shows me the absolute need of the new birth, and of the Holy Spirit and His work within me, so much as the Sermon on the Mount. **These Beatitudes crush me to the ground. They show me my utter helplessness. Were it not for the new birth, I am undone.** Read it and study it, face yourself in the light of it. It will drive you to see your ultimate need of the rebirth and the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing that so leads to the gospel and its grace as the Sermon on the Mount....

“The more we live and try to practice this Sermon on the Mount, the more shall we experience blessing. Look at the blessings that are promised to those who do practice it. The trouble with much holiness teaching is that it leaves out the Sermon on the Mount, and asks us to experience sanctification. That is not the biblical method. If you want to have power in your life and to be blessed, go straight to the Sermon on the Mount. **Live and practice it and give yourself to it, and as you do so the promised blessings will come.** ‘Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.’ If you want to be filled, don’t seek some mystic blessing; don’t rush to meetings hoping you will get it. Face the Sermon on the Mount and its implications and demands, see the utter need, and then you will get it. It is the direct road to blessing....

“I suggest to you it is the best means of evangelism. Surely we all ought to be urgently concerned about this at the present time. The world today is looking for, and desperately needs, true Christians. I am never tired of saying that **what the Church needs to do is not to organize evangelistic campaigns to attract outside people, but to begin herself to live the Christian life.** If she did that, men and women would be crowding into our buildings. They would say, ‘What is the secret of this?’ “ [Lloyd-Jones, *Sermon on Mount*]

MUST READING: *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, by D. Martin Lloyd-Jones. *If found in any book store or catalog, buy without hesitation!*