

The Gospel of

MATTHEW

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT



SECTION 1:

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is the greatest sermon ever preached.

Covering just three chapters in Matthew's Gospel, this short sermon gets to the heart of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. In it, Jesus shows his followers how discipleship impacts every area of life—from how we read our Bibles, to how we manage our money and treat other people. Jesus calls his followers to redefine entire human categories, like this:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:2)

Blessed are the poor? The world has no category for this concept—and that's precisely Jesus' point. These statements reveal the upside down nature of the kingdom of God, confronting the culture and proposing a new way of life for his followers. The Sermon on the Mount is a sermon, not for other people, but for you. It's a mirror, not a magnifying glass. Jesus' sermon calls for each person to consider his claims, take to heart his teachings, and follow him.

SECTION 2:

JESUS' TEACHING IS ROOTED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Sometimes, we tend to think of Jesus and the Christian faith as completely separate from any other religion and forget that Jesus was a Jew. He was born in Israel with Jewish parents, raised in a Jewish household, presented at the Jewish temple, saturated in the Jewish religion of his day, and studied the Hebrew Scriptures. If we desire to understand Jesus' life and his teachings, it is important to learn about the Jewish culture around him. The Scriptures that Jesus read are often called the TaNaK, a three-part collection made up of the Torah (Law), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings). Later on in the Christian tradition, these Scriptures were reordered into the Old Testament Bible as we know it today.

| תורה / 'torah' | נביאים / 'nevi'im' | כתובים / 'ketuvim' |
|---|---|---|
| The Law tells the foundational story of God's people and their covenant with him | The Prophets tell the stories of God speaking to his people through his messengers | The Writings include the rest of Scripture: wisdom, poetry, psalms, and history |
| Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy | Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the 12 Minor Prophets | Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles |

Jesus and his early followers were steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures, tuned in to all the core themes. When reading the Sermon on the Mount, look for references and allusions to all three parts of the Hebrew Scriptures and take some time to learn their significance. If we work to read, study, and understand the Old Testament, we can begin to understand the fuller picture of Jesus and what he actually came to accomplish.

SECTION 3:

JESUS IS THE AUTHORITATIVE TEACHER OF THE LAW

Throughout his gospel, Matthew presents Jesus as a teacher of the Law, similar to Moses. When teaching, Moses appealed to the authority of God. But Jesus does not have to appeal to any higher authority, because he possesses the authority of God.

“And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.” (Matthew 7:28-29)

Jesus refers to the Old Testament Law, but when he does, he presents his teachings beside the Law and its interpretations, saying things like, “You have heard it said . . . but I say to you.” He is not throwing out the Law as if it were null and void; he is sharpening the point. Jewish people in his day took pride in following the Law by the letter, but they still had impure hearts. Jesus gets to the heart of the Law. As the authoritative teacher of the Law, Jesus calls for radical, heart-level obedience to his kingdom ethic.

SECTION 4:

THE BEATITUDES

Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with nine blessings, or ‘beatitudes,’ a common form of poetic teaching that the Jews knew well. Similar to saying “roses are red...” today, the people on the mountainside would have recognized the format and listened carefully to hear Jesus’ version of the teaching. However, while the format was familiar, Jesus’ words were radically counter cultural. Use the visual on the right to compare Jesus’ blessings to a few of those of Ben Sirach, a famous Jewish teacher who gave his version of the nine blessings two centuries before Jesus.

Jesus gave us a picture of the kingdom of heaven as an ‘upside down kingdom,’ one where the poor and the weak will be blessed. This picture of the kingdom reflects the character of the king as one who cares for those whom society has cast aside. When we see the beatitudes in this light, we see that they’re not a formula for how to get into heaven, or an instruction manual for life; they’re a beautiful painting of life in the kingdom of heaven, and the heart of the king who created it.

| Ben Sirach | Jesus |
|--|--|
| Happy is a man who lives to see the downfall of his foes | Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God |
| Happy is he who has not served a man inferior to himself | Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth |
| Happy is he who has gained good sense, and speaks to attentive listeners | Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account |

SECTION 5:

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Jesus gave us his personal prayer, teaching us how to pray and inviting us to pray with him. The Lord's Prayer should not only be prayed along with Jesus, but should also be used as a guide to shape our own prayer patterns. Many of us know the Lord's Prayer, but have you ever stopped to think about what it means?

| The Lord's Prayer | What does it mean? |
|---|---|
| Our Father in heaven | Jesus invites us to recognize God as Father, conveying the authority, warmth, and intimacy of a loving father's care, while emphasizing the sovereign rule of God over all creation from heaven |
| hallowed be your name | a petition that God would be treated as holy (set apart) with the highest respect and honor |
| your kingdom come | that God would extend his rule over the world and in the hearts and lives of believers in his church |
| your will be done | that God's desires would be carried out—this is a statement of submission to God's ways and his plans |
| on earth as it is in heaven | both a petition—that God's heavenly kingdom and Divine Will would be realized on earth—and a change in perspective in the prayer from heaven to earth |
| give us this day our daily bread | that God would provide for our daily physical needs, just as he did for the Israelites in the wilderness |
| and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors | that our personal fellowship with God, hindered by sin, would be restored |
| and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil | that God would keep us from difficult situations—some of which may lead us toward sin—and help us to persevere through the hardship |

SECTION 6:

JESUS FULFILLS THE LAW

The Law (or Torah) tells the foundational story of God's people and their covenant with Him. In this covenant, God promises to protect and bless the nation of Israel if they keep a set of rules and rituals. We call them the Old Testament laws. The purpose of the Law was to point to the way of true life. Even though they knew the Law, the chosen people of God consistently chose to disobey the Law and were unable to obey because their hearts were like stone. Israel needed a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26-27). Instead of pointing to life, the Law pointed to humanity's failure and condemned those under its rule.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” (Matthew 5:17)

Jesus was claiming that he was bringing the story of God's people and their covenant with him to its fulfillment. He was the one the prophets spoke about who would come to solve the problem of our hard human hearts and lead us in obedience as a new human. In living a perfect life, Jesus was the first human who obeyed all the moral laws (1 Peter 2:22), and in his sacrificial death, the ceremonies and sacrifices were finally and fully satisfied (Hebrews 10:11-14). The purpose of the Law, to point the way to true life, is fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is the way to true life as he said to his disciples, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

SECTION 7:

THE TWO WAYS

Jesus ends his sermon in Matthew 7 with a call to action for his disciples: now that they've heard his words, how will they respond? He leaves them with three images: of two gates (7:13-14), of two trees (7:15-20), and of two foundations (7:24-27). Jesus uses these images to present them with a path to life, and a path to destruction. This passage serves as a warning for all of Jesus' followers to choose the path to life by following the commands and teachings he has just given. Now that we know these things, how will we respond? Will we build our foundation on the rock, or on the sand?

| Life | Destruction |
|---|--|
| Narrow is the gate that leads to life | Wide is the gate that leads to destruction |
| Every healthy tree bears good fruit | Every diseased tree bears bad fruit |
| The wise man builds his house upon the rock | The foolish man builds his house upon the sand |