

Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount

Call to Worship: Psalm 130

Hymn Insert- *How Deep the Father's Love for Us*

1st Scripture: Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-20 Hymn #675- *A Wonderful Savior is Jesus My Lord*

2nd Scripture: Matthew 5:1-2

Hymn Insert- *Before the Throne of God Above*

Introduction

As we have seen from the beginning of our study of Matthew, Matthew, primarily appealing to a Jewish audience, has gone to great lengths to affirm the Messianic calling and office of the Lord Jesus. And one of the major themes of his Gospel, suited to meet this purpose, has been to identify the true nature of the Kingdom of Heaven, which is God's glorious, eternal Kingdom, in contradistinction to the religion that has been taught and presented by the Pharisees, who have attempted to build an earthly kingdom, utilizing the Mosaic Law as a means of securing God's favor. And in doing this, because such a kingdom has no power within it to transform the lives of those who enter it (the Law only condemns sinners, and offers no power to save or change them), the religious leaders have designed a self-righteous system that equates "outward show" with the righteousness of God.

It has been Matthew's purpose to expose the superficial nature of the kingdom presented by the Pharisees, while providing a true understanding of the Kingdom of Heaven, which is a kingdom of the heart; a kingdom that, at its very core, deals with the sinful heart of man, changing man from the inside out, in accordance with the Gospel of this Kingdom, unto the glory of God. And the glorious Messiah and Ruler of this Kingdom, the Lord Jesus Christ, has ushered this Kingdom in, by means of His incarnation. And now, having been anointed by the Holy Spirit at His baptism, and having overcome the temptations of the devil in the wilderness, He has been traveling around, teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven and its true nature, presenting Himself as the only way into it. And as He preached up in Galilee, moving from synagogue to synagogue, His teaching on the Kingdom of Heaven, was accompanied by signs and wonders, which authenticated and affirmed all that He had said about it.

This morning then, we come to a critical juncture in Matthew's Gospel, where he gives special attention to a sermon that our Lord had preached, somewhere on a mountain in Galilee,

where multitudes from all over the land of Israel had gathered to hear Him speak, as He addressed His twelve Apostles. The next three Chapters contain a detailed account of much of our Lord's sermon, spoken on this mount. And as we work through the whole of this sermon, we will find that it contains quite a thorough and in-depth look at the quality of heart, that makes up the citizenship of God's "Kingdom of Heaven." To this end, we are inevitably forced to discover the answer to those most important questions, "What does a Christian truly look like? What does true faith in Christ ultimately bring about in the life of a redeemed sinner? What work does the Holy Spirit accomplish in the lives of those whom He indwells (those who have been born again)? What is the difference between Pharisaical Judaism (or any other religion for that matter) and authentic Christianity? What is the difference between a non-Christian and a Christian?" As we answer such questions through the grid of this sermon, and we examine ourselves in the light of this grid, Matthew's hope is that his audience will be led to flee to the only means of entering and becoming part of this Kingdom.

This morning then, we will begin by considering some important introductory information that will help us properly work through and apply what our Lord teaches in this very important sermon.

I. The Primary and Secondary Targets

First, if we are going to understand the message here given by our Lord, then we must consider who He is *primarily* speaking to. This will help us avoid a lot of problems and traps that many have fallen into, by misapplying the message, because they have failed to properly understand the breakdown of the audience, to whom our Lord is speaking. The critical importance of getting this right, will be seen in a moment.

In Luke's Gospel, which is probably the most chronologically organized of the Gospels, we find that just prior to this event, after praying through the entire night, our Lord had set apart twelve of His disciples to be His Apostles. These twelve (ultimately less Judas Iscariot, of course) would be given the great task of laying the foundation of His church. And so, they were also given the ability to perform signs and wonders (to heal sicknesses and cast out demons), as a means of authenticating their message (and calling), as ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, this is an important, watershed moment, because as these ambassadors were set apart unto Christ, our Lord then prepares them to ultimately replace those whom God had formerly used to teach His people, who have now become corrupted, namely, the priests and scribes (the religious leaders) of the people. The Old was passing away, along with its corrupted system of defilement, and the New was now on the horizon. The church; the worldwide church, would be built on a new foundation, with the Messiah (who has now arrived) becoming the Chief Cornerstone. And by this means, our Lord would build the Kingdom of Heaven, which had now arrived at His coming.

And so, this sermon on the mountain, is first and foremost, spoken to these twelve ambassadors, in preparing them to recognize and teach the true nature of the Kingdom of Heaven, which had now dawned upon them. That is why Luke's accounting of this event, begins with the words, "Then He (Jesus) lifted His eyes *toward His disciples*, and said: 'Blessed are you poor...etc.'" And here, in Matthew's gospel, we are told (vs. 1-2) that when (Jesus) was seated, *His disciples came to Him*. Then He opened His mouth and taught *them*, saying, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit...'" And so, this sermon is spoken first, and *primarily*, to the disciples of our Lord, in preparing them to be His faithful ambassadors, unto the building of His church and Kingdom.

That said, *secondarily*, the multitudes (as a whole) were also to benefit from this teaching, as they looked upon our Lord, as He taught His disciples. And so, yes, it was intentional that the large multitude hear these words as well, but again, as observers, looking upon the preparation and training of the Apostles. And to this end, this multitude was also able to witness our Lord setting apart and granting His authority to His Apostles, which is also important. Now, why do I say all of this? Why is it important to understand that this sermon is spoken first to the Apostles, and then secondarily to the multitude at large?

1) Because, while this sermon does address the true nature of salvation and life in the Kingdom, and while it does expose the reality of hypocrisy among some who will claim to be in the Kingdom, it is not primarily evangelistic in nature. In other words, this sermon was not, and ought never to be used, as providing *the means* for entering the Kingdom of Heaven. It does not provide the means of being saved, to those who are unsaved. It is not meant to be presented as a list of the types of things sinners must do *to enter* the Kingdom of God, any more than the

Mosaic Law is to be presented as such (and we will see a connection between this sermon and the Law of God, as well, in due time). And, in fact, to use it in this way would be extremely dangerous and soul crippling, because it would be to attempt to charge the dead to do things that only the living can do [III: Imagine commanding a lifeless squirrel to go and gather nuts, and to build a nest in the tree. It's absurd, because the squirrel has no life or power to do such things. It needs life first! Likewise, this sermon presumes the new birth, and presents the fruit of that new birth. Being "poor in spirit or pure in heart...etc," are virtues which cannot be conjured up in the heart of the unbeliever]

Now, that said, this sermon can be used evangelistically, if it is presented in such a way as to expose hypocrisy and a spurious faith, or, as a means of driving listeners to the only hope of becoming what is described here (which we will seek to do, all throughout), but it ought never to be presented as the *means* of entering the Kingdom of Heaven. And sadly, there are sincere preachers and Christians, who have borrowed from this sermon, using it as a means of salvation, which it never was meant to offer, nor could provide.

2) It is equally, therefore, important to recognize that this, not being primarily an evangelistic sermon, is not meant to be a presentation of laws and commands which God's holy and righteous nature would normally expect of man (but which we cannot keep), so as, to drive us away from them and unto Christ, because we cannot keep them. In other words, Jesus is not intending here, to show us what the people of God could never do, so as to drive them to faith alone, in Him. For the unbeliever, this is true, but it is critical for us to realize that what is taught here is actually meant to describe the type of heart and nature that actually exists within those who are already in Christ, and who are part of the Kingdom of Heaven.

We can say it this way. While no Christian is perfect, and while every Christian (presently alive in this world) is undergoing a process of sanctification unto Christlikeness, the general summation of what is described in this sermon ought to be descriptive of all truly born again believers. These are the true fruits of regeneration, conversion, and of the Holy Spirit's work within the people of God. And so, all in all, this sermon should be descriptive of the heart and life of any and every true believer who is in Christ Jesus. When Jesus speaks of the necessity of having a righteousness that is greater than that of the Scribes and Pharisees (vs. 20),

He is speaking of a righteousness that is produced in the inside of the heart (which makes its way out), and not merely a righteousness that is outward in appearance. This must be the true nature of all who are in the Kingdom of Heaven, and that is what distinguishes authentic Christianity from Pharisaical Judaism (and every other religion in the world, for that matter). It is a Kingdom of the heart, lived out in every sphere of our lives, such that even our worship is in “spirit” (from the inside) and “truth” (in accordance with God’s revealed will, given in His Word).

And so, brethren, this sermon ought to describe each and every one of us, in a very real and sincere sense, albeit, notwithstanding that we are still imperfect and desperately in need of constant grace. I say this, because there are some who miss out on the sanctifying blessing of this sermon, because they presume that it is simply presenting a standard that we cannot, and therefore, are not expected to meet. No, while our salvation is always, only based on Christ alone, this is a description of how we ought to live and think, as we work out our salvation in Christ. Again, although imperfect, we strive unto these ends, and such a general pattern of the heart, as presented within these three Chapters, ought to be contained within us...if we are truly in Christ.

And so, this sermon is spoken first to Christ’s regenerate Apostles, and then secondly, in the presence of the multitude at large.

II. An Overview of the Sermon

Now, before we conclude our introduction to the sermon on the mount, it is important that we pull back and consider a “big picture” overview of the entire sermon, in the light of what we have already considered, concerning the primary and secondary audience.

To this end, I would divide the entire sermon into roughly six sections:

1) The Beatitudes (vs. 1-12). The beatitudes, containing the famous list of “Blessed’s,” preface the entire sermon with a summation of the heart attitudes which are consistent with the nature of all who are truly part of the Kingdom of God. And as we work through these, one at a time, you will find that right from the outset, our Lord is making a connection between the promises that were given in the Old Covenant, and those whom God had truly intended to receive the blessings associated with those promises. This is our Lord saying, “Look, simply

being of Jewish ethnic descent, or simply seeking to meet the outward standard of the Law of God, has never been what God was after. These inward virtues and qualities, formed in the heart by God, must be embedded in the very souls of all who are truly part of His Kingdom.” In other words, brethren, this is not Jesus stating something radically new to the Jews, or to anyone for that matter. This is Jesus correcting all misunderstandings about the Kingdom of Heaven. We will see, going forward, that all of these beatitudes contain promises that were given in the Old Covenant. And so, right from the outset; in the very preface, we find that Jesus is not bringing about anything new in this sermon, but rather, He is correcting what has been distorted, so as to reveal what has always been the case, and which has been utterly defiled by Pharisaical Judaism.

And these beatitudes then, form the very heart and soul of the entire sermon, providing us with a general understanding of the quality of life which will make up God’s true people. And it is out of this general list of virtues that the more detailed actions, given throughout the rest of the sermon will grow. This is the soil, within which the fruits of godly living will begin to be formed. And as we work through these beatitudes, it is important that we recognize from the outset, that they are a unit. Together, they are descriptive of the type of heart, which all who are truly followers of Christ must and will have [Note: In a context where such a large multitude is presently following Christ, this is critical, because it brings to bear what *truly* following Christ looks like, and what a *true* faith in Christ will most certainly lead into; John 2:23-3:3]

2) Salt and Light (vs. 13-16). Here, we will find a critical motivation, which God will install in the hearts of all of His true people, which would compel them all the more to live in these ways, and in accordance with these virtues. And it is not that God will push these motivations upon His people, in the form of Law, but rather, upon changing their hearts, He sets their desires in the new found direction of striving to glorify Him, so as to open up His glory before the watching world. It becomes the true Christian’s greatest passion, who has been freely redeemed by God in Christ, to set this God and all of His glory before a world that presently lies in darkness. And so, our Lord emphasizes this reality to His Apostles, right from the outset.

3) The Quality of Righteousness Needed (vs. 17-20). Here, our Lord provides critical introductory comments, which will serve as a main gateway into the remainder of the sermon. And it is here, brethren, that I believe, we will come to perhaps the most important portion of the

remainder of the sermon, because by it, we find the key that will unlock everything that follows. And so, when we get to this text, it will be important that we properly expound it, in order to rightly grasp all that follows. Here, we find a general description of the quality of righteousness that is needed, for all who are to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. To a Jewish audience in particular, this is the blow that greatly prepares them to pay careful attention to all that follows.

4) Dealing with Pharisaical Teachings (vs. 21-48). Within this section, you will find our Lord dealing with the Pharisaical abuses and misuses of the Law. In other words, here, He contends not with the OT Scriptures which the religious leaders were using, but rather, with the erroneous ways, in which, the religious leaders were seeking to misrepresent, teach and apply these laws. And as our Lord addresses each individual Law, you will find Him repeatedly stating, “You have heard that it was said to those of old...But I say to you...” And so, He seeks to correct the misuse of several Mosaic Laws, getting to the heart of these Laws, while unraveling the legalistic, outward shell, which had been placed upon them.

5) Dealing with Pharisaical Actions (vs. 6:1-7:12). Having dealt with the erroneous teachings of the religious leaders, our Lord then targets their ungodly actions and lives. And so, whereas, in one vein, He dealt with the issue of “You’ve been told this, but I tell you this,” now, on a second vein, He deals with the issue of, “You’ve seen these kinds of behaviors and actions, but do these instead.” And in reality, we can note that the problem with the ungodly actions, certainly has its root in the ungodly teaching. But, our Lord exposes and corrects both, exhorting His Apostles to live and teach in such a way, that would compliment the attitudes that He had described at the very beginning of the sermon.

6) Concluding Exhortation (vs. 7:13-29). Finally, in the final section of the sermon, our Lord provides warnings, reminding His people that the way into this Kingdom of Heaven is extremely narrow. The citizenship described throughout the sermon is a very small minority (compared to the whole of all humanity). And therefore, one must not be presumptuous, but rather diligent, ensuring that he does all to enter in through the narrow gate. This warning is followed by a description of false prophets, and true and false citizens of the kingdom, showing that a mere profession of being a citizen of God’s Kingdom is insufficient. There are hypocrites.

There are counterfeit citizens, and our Lord provides us with concluding words that can help us recognize the difference between true and false converts.

And so, this is a general overview of the sermon on the mount then, brethren.

III. Concluding Thoughts

All in all, brethren, the kingdom that God is building for Himself, sets Christ as the eternal Ruler of this Kingdom (in accordance with His promise to David), and includes a citizenship that, through the Gospel, is changed from the inside, out, unto ultimate conformity to the King, the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other kingdom or people like this, nor could there ever be. Pharisaical Judaism offers a sham kingdom that presents a glory that is limited to the outer senses, but the true Kingdom of God gets into, and deals with the heart, which is what God sees, and is important to Him. God has never, ever been impressed by outward appearances. He has always been concerned about sincerity and truth. He is Spirit, and those who worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

I hope that in the weeks and months ahead, brethren, that this sermon on the mount will both, help affirm the genuine spirit of our faith, while motivating us to continue, by the power of God in Christ, to grow in accordance with the desire and will of God for us.

And I hope that in the weeks and months ahead, that if you are not in Christ, that getting a glorious glimpse of God's righteous Kingdom, will compel and drive you to seek Christ in truth, so that you might be brought into this Kingdom, and given a heart that desires, and has power to live in accordance with the virtuous designs that are presented in this sermon. You will not enter into the consummated Kingdom of Heaven, if this sermon does not describe you, in a general sense. And you cannot even begin to live like this, until you are reconciled to God, and empowered by God to do so, in Christ! [The Gospel!!!]

Amen

Benediction: Ephesians 3:14-21