



## **The Sermon of a Lifetime, #2**

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Last week we started a study of the Sermon on the Mount, those wonderful chapters in Matthew 5-7. That is where we are going back again this morning.

Just by way of review for those of you that weren't here, the Sermon on the Mount comes as Matthew presents the beginning of Jesus' ministry after 400 years of silence from the Lord. No word from the prophets, no word from the Lord. Now the night of the silence from God was finally coming to an end and the day was about to dawn. Jesus had come. The kingdom of heaven was at hand because the king was now on the scene.

Last week we looked at Matthew 3 very briefly and saw John the Baptist being the forerunner for the Lord Jesus. God for that moment shined the spotlight on John the Baptist and drew the people's attention to his ministry. Once their attention was captivated by the ministry of John the Baptist, he would then point over to the Lord Jesus Christ and Jesus would take the baton and truly introduce the kingdom on a fuller basis.

So as we come to the Sermon on the Mount, we are looking at a new era in redemptive history. No longer was God going to speak through human prophets. Now God was going to speak to men through His Son as the writer of Hebrews says.

Turn to Matthew 4:17, which is really a foundational verse to everything that follows in the rest of the gospel. John the Baptist had affirmed Jesus. The Father had affirmed Jesus. As we come to verse 17, Matthew writes:

*From that time, Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

This phrase "from that time" really marks the beginning of Jesus' official ministry. It is a major turning point in the life of Christ and in the gospel of Matthew in particular. So Matthew records as this opening statement, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The question is, "What does that mean?" What follows? How did Jesus explain what that meant? What was the significance of that message?

Well, what follows immediately after that message (after some discussion about how crowds gathered around Him) was the Sermon on the Mount. So we should understand the Sermon on the Mount as being Jesus' exposition and explanation of what it means to

“repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” As Jesus comes the sun, as it were, is rising and light is about to shine on the true nature of the kingdom.

Now we said last time that to repent was to fundamentally turn away from sin and turn toward God in submission to Him through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. To repent is to bring about the end of you. The old man dies and new life begins in the kingdom of heaven.

So Matthew takes that statement, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” and flows almost immediately into the Sermon on the Mount. This is the life of the kingdom. This is the life that flows out of repentance when one is born into the kingdom of God.

Last time I set forth the twin calls of the Sermon on the Mount. Last week we took a space shuttle view of the Sermon on the Mount—just looking at the very big picture to get in our minds exactly what this sermon is intended to be.

First of all, we said that the Sermon on the Mount is:

### **1. A Call to Holiness**

In Matthew 5:20, Jesus says:

*I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Not everyone enters the kingdom. Jesus said the way is narrow and there are few who find that way. And it is a call to holiness. Look at Matthew 5:48. After expounding on the law of God, Jesus says:

*Therefore, you are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

In Matthew 6:33, He said:

*Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.*

So the Sermon on the Mount is a call to righteousness, a call to holy living, a call to that dynamic character that reflects the character of God Himself.

We said that the world of the Sermon on the Mount, the world that Jesus describes in the midst of this call to righteousness, is a real and sinful world where the believer, the citizen of the kingdom of heaven, encounters persecution, lies, hostile relationships, anxiety, hypocrisy, false teaching and more.

The message of the Sermon on the Mount is that you are to live a holy life *despite* those obstacles to your soul. That interference from a sinful world is no excuse to check out, to give in, to give up. That is the environment in which your Christian life is to *flourish*.

You don't look at those obstacles as things that keep you from walking with God. They are simply the wind under your wings to lift you up even higher.

So the Sermon on the Mount is a call to holiness, a call to righteousness.

Secondly (and this is very important) the Sermon on the Mount is also:

## **2. A Call to Blessing**

The call to righteousness is unmistakable. And yet this call to righteousness is not a harsh decree from a remote God. The call to righteousness comes from a loving Father who wants to bless His children who live in His kingdom. This call to righteousness is not from a God who has His arms folded across the chest just waiting to count out misdemeanors.

No. Far to the contrary. The Sermon on the Mount is filled with the promise of untold blessings upon the people of the kingdom.

The Sermon on the Mount defines God's standard of righteousness and thus exposes your spiritual poverty. But it does it in a way that points you to the spiritual resources and the spiritual blessings that are found at the Father's right hand.

Nine times in Matthew 5:3-10, Jesus pronounces blessing on the men and women of this character. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." "Blessed are those who mourn." "Blessed are the gentle." "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." On and on it goes.

So it is important for us to have a balanced perspective as we look at the Sermon on the Mount. Yes, it is a call to righteousness and exposes my spiritual bankruptcy. But it also comes from a loving Father who wants to bless His children. So it convicts us and it draws us at the same time.

Jesus said in Matthew 6: 33:

*Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you.*

We will look in the future what "all these things" mean, but you can see that the call to righteousness attaches with it a promised blessing that God is going to add things to you.

In Matthew 7:7, He says:

*Seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you.*

Verse 11:

*Your Father who is in heaven will give what is good to those who ask Him.*

So this call to holiness comes from a good and loving and giving Father to those who are in His kingdom.

A balanced understanding of the Sermon on the Mount will keep both of those things in mind. Emphasizing the call to holiness to the exclusion of blessing could lead to discouragement and despair. Focusing exclusively on the promise of blessing could lead to spiritual carelessness. That's the brief review from last time.

Last time I intentionally left unasked an important question: To whom is this life available? Who can receive it? Who may live it? Who receives this call? Who is Jesus describing?

One writer calculated the number of different answers to that question and came to thirty-six. I think that is probably thirty-five too many. There are thirty-five people who are wrong because there is only one true interpretation of scripture.

For our part, there is no need to go through all of those. But there are two interpretations that I think are especially important for us to deal with.

#### *The Social Gospel View*

One would be the view that says that the Sermon on the Mount is a prescription for human ethics in general. The social gospel. It has the idea (and I am over simplifying it) that if we could just educate all men to live this way, we might be able to usher in peace on earth. The presupposition of this view is that the Sermon on the Mount is intended for all men.

But that is clearly wrong. This sermon could not possibly apply to all men in general ( at least without some major qualification in your thinking) because Jesus in 5:3 specifically restricts it to those men and women who are poor in spirit. The Sermon opens with a statement about humble character that describes the people to whom Jesus is speaking.

Think also about Romans 3:10-12. Paul said:

*There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.*

So the teaching of the Bible about the lost estate of man would instruct us that the unsaved man cannot possibly live out the Sermon on the Mount. Men who are spiritually lost and dead in their trespasses and sins do not have the spiritual resources to live this life. They are not even attracted to it because it describes the character of God Himself and no one seeks God. So it would be impossible for that view to be correct if you take the fullness of the teaching of the Bible into account.

The Sermon on the Mount requires spiritual power and desires that do not exist among the unredeemed. So it is futile to talk about preaching the Sermon on the Mount to the world at large apart from the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. This sermon is intended for redeemed men because the unsaved man is sinful and this life is not even possible to him.

So, beloved, in a room of this size, it would be important for me to say that unless you repent of your sins and put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, this sermon is outside your capability. You cannot live the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus said “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” It assumes a change. So to call men to the Sermon on the Mount apart from the gospel of Christ is to ask a circle to be square. It asks a blind man to see and a lame man to walk without giving him the capacity to do so. So that social view of the Sermon on the Mount is too broad. It doesn’t take into account the spiritual incapacity of man.

There are others who make the application of the Sermon on the Mount too narrow. Some of you may have heard of this. I won’t spend a lot of time on it. But it is important to address this.

#### *The Future Millennium View*

There are some people who are committed to Bible teaching who say that the Sermon on the Mount is not intended for believers today. They say this teaching is restricted for that thousand-year period where Christ is going to reign on the earth. They say it is only for people living in the millennium. One famous writer went so far as to say that “The Sermon on the Mount is neither the privilege nor the duty of the church.”

In the language we are using here today, he would say that the Sermon on the Mount’s call to blessing and call to holiness do not apply to the church today.

What shall we say to this?

First of all, I think it is necessary to say that if you just read through Matthew’s gospel and you read the Sermon on the Mount for what it says without bringing any presuppositions to it, you would never find that view from the text itself. This view is nowhere to be found in what Christ said in the Sermon on the Mount.

Indeed, the exhortations of the Sermon on the Mount are found throughout the New Testament. The entire New Testament speaks of this ethic, and the New Testament speaks to the church. So it would be artificial and useless to exclude the Sermon on the Mount from believers today.

But even more persuasive to me than that very brief summary is what Jesus Himself says at the end of the gospel in Matthew 28:18-20. Jesus’ ministry on earth has been completed. He has been crucified for the sins of everyone who would ever believe in

Him. He has been raised from the dead. He is about to ascend back into heaven to return to His Father. Matthew is concluding his gospel at this point with Jesus is speaking to His disciples, those *Jewish* men who were gathered around Him.

Look at what He says to them in Matthew 28:18-20:

*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*

So Jesus, at the conclusion of His ministry, looks back on His earthly life and looks forward to the time where He is going to ascend to be with the Father. What did He say to His disciples?

He says, “Go and make disciples of all the nations.”

You know what? That includes you. You are a disciple in any nation.

And what are these Jewish disciples supposed to do?

They are supposed to teach you, teach the Gentiles, teach all the nations, to observe all that Jesus had commanded *them*. That includes the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus said to go into all nations and teach them without restriction, teach them freely—everything that I commanded to you.

That has to include the Sermon on the Mount.

So within Matthew’s gospel itself you see that the Sermon on the Mount was intended to apply to more than the people living in the millennium. It applies to everyone who receives Christ through the teaching of the apostles.

If you are a Christian here today, you fit in that category. The Sermon on the Mount is your duty. The Sermon on the Mount is your privilege—great Bible teachers speaking to the contrary notwithstanding.

Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16:

*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.*

That includes the Sermon on the Mount. We don’t cut the Sermon on the Mount out of the Bible while we are waiting for the millennium to be ushered in.

Here is why that is so crucial. I want you to understand this because it is a preparatory step into the Sermon on the Mount.

The Sermon on the Mount is a searching, convicting word from the Lord Jesus Christ. It cuts you to the deepest core of your being. It goes to the very core of what motivates you to do everything that you do. It applies to every relationship that you have. It applies to every prayer that you ever utter before the Father's throne.

And it exposes you for being sinful and falling short of the glory of God.

Beloved, if a teacher gives you *any* reason to avoid the direct impact of the Sermon of the Mount on your soul, your heart will leap for it. Your heart will run to it because it wants to escape the conviction that this sermon brings.

But that escape route isn't open. Your heart is laid open and laid bare before the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus intends you to hear these words. Jesus intends you to be convicted. Jesus intends you to know the blessing that He promised in this sermon.

So we reject any effort to exclude modern believers from the scope of the Sermon on the Mount. This is the spiritual nerve center of vibrant Christianity. It should never be separated from the believer today.

So if it is not for all men in general, if it is not limited to the people in the millennium, who is it for?

### *The Citizens of the Kingdom*

It is for the citizens of the kingdom. That includes you if you are in Christ, because the kingdom is the place where the King reigns. That includes believers today.

I am not saying that there is not going to be a future manifestation of the kingdom that will reorder world history. The Bible teaches that.

But the Bible also talks about the kingdom as something that has come in the life of believers today. Look at Colossians 1:13-14, where Paul is speaking about the glories of salvation.

*He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us (past tense) to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

By faith in Jesus Christ and His atoning work on the cross, you as a believer in Christ have Christ as your king. The Bible says you are already in His kingdom. Now having entered into that kingdom, the Sermon on the Mount describes the life that should and *will* flow out of you as a result of being under the rule of Christ.

John Stott said it this way:

*The Sermon on the Mount portrays the repentance and righteousness which belong to the kingdom. It describes what human life and human community look like when they come under the gracious rule of God.*

If your soul is under the gracious rule of Christ your King, you are in the kingdom. This sermon speaks to you with authority, power, and promise.

With that understanding, we come to the Sermon on the Mount.

It is important for us to see this sermon in broad strokes before we move on to individual verses. We are coming into a lower level of orbit, but we are not going to land the plane just yet. We are going from the space shuttle view to the passenger jet view at 30,000 feet.

You can see the contours of the land, but we are still looking at it from an overview perspective. We need to see the forest before we see the trees.

There are basically five main elements to the Sermon on the Mount that I want to call out to you to see in a broad fashion. First, the Sermon on the Mount addresses:

### **1. The Christian's Character (5:3-10)**

That is the whole point of the Beatitudes in verses 3-10. Jesus starts with a description of Christian character and (get this) then assumes that character throughout the rest of the Sermon.

That means you can't pick an isolated verse in chapter 6 or 7 and say "What does this mean?" You always have to start with the fact that Jesus is talking to a people of a particular character and addresses them. In Matthew 5:3-5, He says:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle.*

Matthew 5:6-10:

*Blessed those who hunger and thirst for righteousness . . . Blessed are the merciful . . . blessed are the pure in heart . . . blessed are the peacemakers . . . blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness.*

Character! Inward desires. Inward motivations. Inward attitudes.

Jesus speaks of this character as being the condition of brokenness that comes from the recognition of our spiritual poverty. A Christian understands that he is in spiritual bankruptcy. Only when you admit your spiritual bankruptcy are you in a position to

receive these blessings. Poor in spirit. Gentle. Hungry and thirsty for righteousness. These are spiritual qualities that mark out the man to whom this Sermon applies.

Yet there is more in this discussion of character. There are promises to the people of this character. The kingdom of heaven belongs to them. They will inherit the earth. They will receive comfort. They will be satisfied.

If I came to you and said, “Who are you?” you would tell me your name. I’m Aaron, I’m John, I’m Sue . . . whatever.

But the Sermon on the Mount asks, “Who are you?” with a totally different meaning. What is your fundamental character like? What are the deepest motivations of your heart? Are you brash and arrogant? Or are you broken before God and gentle before men?

That is the level that the Sermon on the Mount comes. What kind of man are you? What kind of woman are you? You can’t answer that in five seconds.

So the Sermon on the Mount addresses us in a way that forbids us to be flippant about Christian character. It forbids us to be just entirely happy-go-lucky without a deep thought ever crossing our minds. It is profound. It addresses Christian character.

Secondly, after addressing Christian character, the Sermon on the Mount speaks to you about:

## **2. The Christian’s Relationship with the World (5:11-16)**

While a Christian has a humble character that God blesses, the world by contrast will not honor him. Christian character brings conflict with the world. Insults and persecutions may come. While God honors this character, the world does not.

So the Christian should have that perspective and be a spiritual influence in the hostile environment around him. Look at 5:11:

*Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

So we step into a different arena in this section of the Sermon. We step into a warning that the world isn’t going to find you the greatest thing since sliced bread.

Yet your call is found in 5:16:

*Let your life shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

Despite the persecution, despite the hostility, you are not allowed to fall into bitterness and resentment and to fight back. You are to let your light shine before men. You are to count it a blessing because as they persecute you for the sake of Christ, you are storing up riches in heaven. Talk about your ultimate bank account, your ultimate retirement account!

And yet, I hardly need to tell you that in America, some Christians devote their lives to making sure that they get their political rights.

Beloved, may I address that directly? You have no rights in the kingdom of God that apply to this earth. God says you are going to be persecuted. People will cast insults at you.

For heaven's sake, the Roman emperor Nero crucified encased Christians in wax, crucified them, and then set them on fire to light up his garden at night. And we are upset because we can't get some kind of benign prayer in school? Give me a break.

Christianity is not about political rights. You are a child of the kingdom of God. The world will persecute you. Don't be surprised by that. Respond to it with godliness. Bless those who persecute you as the Sermon on the Mount says.

So the Sermon on the Mount asks what your relationship with the unsaved people around you is like. Do you understand the dynamic of conflict that comes with unbelievers as a result of your walk with Christ? Do you embrace your responsibility to be light in a sin-cursed world?

Those of you attracted to a political mindset have to make your choice. Is it politics or the kingdom of God? The Sermon on the Mount doesn't leave room for both.

But it is more than your Christian character and relationship to a fallen world. The Sermon on the Mount also addresses:

### **3. The Christian's Relationship to the Law of God (5:17-48)**

The Sermon on the Mount addresses the way you respond to the law of God. Look at 5:17. Having addressed the Christian's relationship to the world, Jesus says:

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.

First of all, you see Christ Himself as being the final fulfillment of everything that the Law and the Prophets required. He lived a perfectly righteous life and discharged the obligations of the law, without flaw and without fault.

Christ fulfilled the law and Christians love him for that. Christians find the remedy for their lack of their obedience in the obedience of Christ.

But Jesus goes beyond His personal fulfillment and addresses things that in way are just immensely invasive. Look at 5:21-22:

*You have heard that the ancients were told ‘You shall not commit murder’ . . . but I say to you, that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court.*

Oh! Take my breath away! It is not enough to say, “I’ve never killed anyone.” The question is, “What about your anger problem?” “What about your irritable spirit?”

The Sermon on the Mount gets personal pretty quickly, doesn’t it?

Look at Matthew 5:27-28:

*You have heard that it was said ‘You shall not commit adultery’; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

Matthew 5:43-45:

*You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.*

So Jesus makes it clear that the law does more than prohibit certain kinds of bad conduct that most of you here are probably not guilty of. (Maybe I am assuming too much even with that statement.)

Jesus says, Christian, I am not just after your conduct. I am prohibiting you from having sinful desires and bad attitudes. I am not just telling you not to sin. I am positively requiring you to manifest righteous conduct and righteous attitudes in your life.

So the Sermon on the Mount shows us that merely avoiding certain conduct has not fulfilled the law. It goes so far beyond that. We could well say that the Sermon on the Mount exposes the hypocrisy of the legalistic fundamentalist and it also rebukes the flesh of the libertine—the person who wants to live any way he wants and hides it all under a false umbrella of grace.

So the Sermon on the Mount asks, what is your heart’s response to the law of God? Do you delight in obedience to His Law? It is very convicting. The one who loves Jesus is glad to respond and say, “Lord, let’s clean my life from the inside out.”

#### **4. The Christian and His Father (6:1-34)**

The Sermon on the Mount also talks about your relationship to the heavenly Father. The Christian has as his motivating goal the desire to seek the approval of God not men. Look at Matthew 6:1 where Jesus says:

*Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise, you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.*

Jesus then talks about doing deeds of charity so that no one knows about them, praying so that men won't praise you for your eloquence before the throne of God, and fasting without calling attention to yourself.

The Christian life is not designed for you to call attention to yourself. It is enough for the Christian to know that the Father sees his life in secret and trust the Father to reward him in the Father's good time and not to make a point of making a show for men. You can do that because the Father is sovereign over all and has good intentions for you. He will reward that life.

I knew a Christian years ago who openly acknowledged that he geared his life to make contact with the right Christians to advance his ministry career. He was very calculating in the way he approached relationships.

I wouldn't exchange places with him no matter where he goes in life. I don't want to live my life for the reward and praise that comes from men, do you? No, we gear our lives simply to see the pleasure of the Father upon it. The Sermon on the Mount calls you to private devotion before the Father, not pious behavior calculated to win the approval of men. We can live this way in utter confidence that we are not going to miss out because we trust Jesus when he says, "The Father who sees in secret will reward you."

So the Sermon on the Mount asks you, Christian, who are you trying to impress?

## **5. The Christian and Coming Judgment (7:1-29)**

Finally, the Sermon on the Mount calls you to live life with the understanding that one day you will stand before Christ and give an account. Matthew 7:1-2:

*Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.*

Look also at Matthew 7:21:

*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles.' And then I will*

*declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'*

The Sermon on the Mount comes to you today and calls you not to simply give lip service to its principles. Jesus says to seek this life, pursue it, appropriate it, and live it both inside and outside. Take heed. Matthew 7:26-27:

*Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.*

Beloved, whatever else happens in your life, you are never going to be able to stand before Christ and say, “No one told me.” This Sermon applies to you. Every aspect of your thoughts and actions, every act of devotion that you could ever do before God, is under the authority of this Sermon.

Who is adequate for these things?

We are driven to one conclusion—a conclusion that Jesus Himself spoke of. The Sermon on the Mount shows you the absolute necessity of the new birth. You must receive a new birth from heaven in order to have the spiritual life and power necessary to live out this Sermon. In Matthew 18:3, Jesus said:

*Unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of God.*

He said in John 3:3:

*Unless you are born again, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.*

Only through the new birth that comes through faith in Christ can you live out this Sermon. You must be born again. Jesus said:

*Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water, springing out to eternal life (John 4:14).*

So if you know Christ today—if you have received that new birth—thank Him. Glory in His name because that is your only hope of escaping the condemnation that this Sermon brings to all of us.

But if you are convicted of sin as a result of what Jesus says here, don't run away. Run to Christ. Run to the one who said He would accept anyone who came to Him and never cast them out. Come to Him in repentant faith and enter into this spiritual life that ultimately leads to the glory of heaven.

Let's pray together, shall we?

*Our Father, we honor you for the words of Christ in this Sermon. We are grateful for the fullness of what they contain. We pray, Father, that as You have given us new life in Christ, that we would walk in Him. And for those who are here without Christ, apart from you, Father—maybe having been here for years—would you convict them and bring them to Christ so that they could enter into your blessed kingdom.*

*In Jesus' name we pray, amen.*

*This transcript was prepared by Shari Main.*