

# ***The Book of Matthew***

## ***The Sermon on the Mount***

Lesson #3 for April 16, 2016

Scriptures: Matthew 5-7; 13:44-52; Romans 7:7; 8:5-10; Genesis 15:6; Micah 6:6-8; Luke 6:36.

1. In this lesson we will discuss some of the major teachings of Jesus not only in the Sermon on the Mount but also in Matthew 13 where He set forth a number of parables.

In the book of Exodus, we see God lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, “baptize” them in the Red Sea, bring them through the wilderness for 40 years, work signs and wonders, and meet with them personally on a mountaintop where He gives them His law.

In the book of Matthew, we see Jesus come out of Egypt, be baptized in the Jordan River, go out into the wilderness for 40 days, work signs and wonders, and meet personally with Israel on a mountaintop where He amplifies this same law. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sabbath, April 9) Were those intentional parallels?

2. No other sermon given in history has had the impact on humanity that the Sermon on the Mount has had. But, the sermon itself will not do us any good unless we apply it to our own lives.
3. Read Matthew 5-7. Look at some of the topics covered in this sermon: True happiness (greetings from heaven); salt and light; teaching about the law, anger, adultery, divorce, vows, revenge, love for enemies, charity, prayer, and fasting; riches in heaven; the light of the body; God and possessions; judging others; “ask, seek, knock”; the narrow gate; a tree and its fruit; “I never knew you”; the two house builders; and the authority of Jesus.

The Sermon on the Mount, though given especially to the disciples, was spoken in the hearing of the multitude. After the ordination of the apostles, Jesus went with them to the seaside. Here in the early morning the people had begun to assemble. Besides the usual crowds from the Galilean towns, there were people from Judea, and even from Jerusalem itself; from Perea, from Decapolis, from Idumea, away to the south of Judea; and from Tyre and Sidon, the Phoenician cities on the shore of the Mediterranean. “When they had heard what great things He did,” they “came to hear Him, and to be healed of their diseases: ... there went virtue out of Him, and healed them all.” Mark 3:8; Luke 6:17-19.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 298.2.

4. Jesus began His sermon by giving a list of the Beatitudes. The Greek word, *makarios*, translated *blessed* in some translations and *happy* in others, opens each of those Beatitudes.

The Beatitudes are Christ’s greeting, not only to those who believe, but to the whole human family. He seems to have forgotten for a moment that He is in the world, not in heaven; and He uses the familiar salutation of the world of light. Blessings flow from His lips as the gushing forth of a long-sealed current of rich life.—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* vii.3.

5. Even among non-Christians and nonreligious people, this sermon has been praised for its ethical and moral standards. So, how do you see the Sermon on the Mount? Is God calling us to an impossibly high moral standard just to humiliate us by proving that we cannot do it? Or, is this simply a call to a social gospel? This sermon calls each person to decide for himself out of his own personal experience how s/he should interpret the words of Jesus.

In the Sermon on the Mount He sought to undo the work that had been wrought by false education, and to give His hearers **a right conception of His kingdom and of His own character**.... The truths He taught are no less important to us than to the multitude that followed Him. We no less than they need to learn the foundation principles of the kingdom of God.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 299.3. [Bold type is added.]

6. The Sermon on the Mount tells us what God is like. It gave “His hearers **a right conception of His kingdom and of His own character**.” (DA 299.3) We have seen in previous discussions that to give an accurate and complete picture of the character of God was the whole mission of Jesus Christ to this earth. (See *Signs of the Times*, January 20, 1890.)
7. When you think about the Sermon on the Mount, how does it strike you? Some Christians have suggested that whereas the Ten Commandments given from Mount Sinai were the law of God in the Old Testament, the Sermon on the Mount given by Jesus is a manifesto for Christians, a sort of “law of Christ,” in the New Testament. They see a kind of system of legalism being replaced by a system of grace. But, is that what Jesus was trying to teach in the Sermon on the Mount? Is there any hint in that sermon that He was trying to do away with the Ten Commandments or any part of the Old Testament? (See Matthew 5:17-19,21-22,27-30. See also James 2:10-11; Romans 7:7.) This sermon is an outgrowth of the Ten Commandments.
8. Read Genesis 15:6 and 26:5. All through the Bible, Abraham was known as a friend of God. (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; and James 2:23) Abraham was and is held up as a great example of faith. It certainly was not because he never made a mistake or never sinned! It was because he related to God like a friend. It was that relationship between them that made Abraham what he was. And it is that kind of relationship which God is calling each of us to discover and emulate.
9. Read Matthew 5:20. What was Jesus implying when He said that our righteousness must “surpass that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law”? What kind of righteousness did the scribes and the Pharisees have? It was only righteousness in their own eyes!
10. Salvation has always been by faith. Any time we discuss the actions that result from faith, there is a tendency to creep into legalism. The Pharisees had perfected legalism! Their religion was a religion of “hard, rigid orthodoxy...destitute of contrition, tenderness or love” that left them with “no power to preserve the world from corruption.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 53.2. Mere outward forms can never save us. Only faith that works by love (Galatians 5:6) can really impact us and those around us. True religion is that spelled out in the Old Testament by Micah in:
11. **Micah 6:6-8** (GNB): <sup>6</sup> What shall I bring to the LORD, the God of heaven, when I come to worship him? Shall I bring the best calves to burn as offerings to him? <sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased if I bring him thousands of sheep or endless streams of olive oil? Shall I offer him my firstborn child to pay for my sins?

<sup>8</sup>No, the LORD has told us what is good. **What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.** [Bold type is added.]

12. Read Matthew 5:43-48. How do those verses make you feel? Does it make you want to become discouraged and give up? Or, does it inspire you? Notice these words from Ellen White.

God's ideal for His children is higher than the highest human thought can reach. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." **This command is a promise.** The plan of redemption contemplates our complete recovery from the power of Satan. Christ always separates the contrite soul from sin. He came to destroy the works of the devil, and He has made provision that the Holy Spirit shall be imparted to every repentant soul, to keep him from sinning.

The tempter's agency is not to be accounted an excuse for one wrong act. Satan is jubilant when he hears the professed followers of Christ making excuses for their deformity of character. It is these excuses that lead to sin. **There is no excuse for sinning. A holy temper, a Christlike life, is accessible to every repenting, believing child of God.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 311.2-3. [Bold type is added.]

13. The Greek in Matthew 5:48 is very interesting. It can be read as a subjunctive command—"You must be perfect"—or, as a future tense—"You will be perfect." Both are spelled exactly the same. Thus, Ellen White got the exact meaning of the Greek without ever having studied Greek. Goodspeed had it right: "You are to be perfect."
14. Jesus Himself demonstrated what He meant by this "perfection" in Matthew 5:43-47 and Luke 6:36. Real Christians will demonstrate the kind of love that Jesus Himself lived. But, we should be very clear that this is not the first time or the last time that we were called to "be holy as God is holy." See Leviticus 19:2; 20:7; and 1 Peter 1:15-16. It is absolutely essential that we recognize that God would never ask us to do something or to accomplish something that He cannot accomplish *in* us. But, that is exactly the point: It is only by having the right kind of relationship with Him that He is able to work in our lives to accomplish what needs to be accomplished. Only He can do it.
15. Read Matthew 7:12, the golden rule. Jesus said: "Do for others what you want them to do for you: this is the meaning of the Law of Moses and of the teachings of the prophets." (GNB) Where did He find that in the Old Testament? Contrast Matthew 7:12 and Proverbs 24:29. Proverbs 24:29 has probably been used many times by many a mother who has a child with a sibling! But, there is a very, very important and subtle difference between Proverbs 24:29 and Matthew 7:12. Can you spot it? One talks about doing evil; the other about doing good.
16. Read Matthew 13:44-52. This is a series of short parables that Jesus gave to one of His audiences. What was He trying to teach? The kingdom of heaven is worth everything. Our relationship with God must come to be the most important thing in our lives. That is not easy for naturally-selfish human beings. There are two main points in the first two of these parables: 1) Nothing must stand in our way, preventing us from obtaining a right relationship with God and, thus, an entrance into the heavenly kingdom. 2) Those who have actually obtained that priceless possession recognize its absolute value. But, Jesus

was only telling stories; the listener has to draw the conclusion for himself. No one could condemn Jesus for telling stories! Compare Mark 4:11-12.

17. Read John 14:6. Jesus assured us that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He said, "No one comes to the Father except through me." This is an incredibly important point. We live in an age where the idea of "absolute truth" is considered old-fashioned at best and dangerous at worst. The idea that we might be guided by great principles and not go along with the crowd is certainly not politically correct in our day.
18. Having briefly looked at the Sermon on the Mount, try to imagine what it would be like to live in a world where everyone lived by the principles in that sermon! That would be heaven.
19. It should be quite clear that the Sermon on the Mount makes love the basic principle of the kingdom of God. Read 1 John 4:7-8,16. If God is indeed love and if love describes a special kind of relationship—the kind of relationship that God wants to have with each one of us and the kind of love which led God to send His Son (John 3:16)—then that kind of love should be our number one goal.
20. Read John 13:33-35. Is it really true that radical love makes the Christian stand out from all those around him/her? Do you know anyone whose life is like that? We live in a world that is motivated by selfishness.

*What is life?* is a question that has preoccupied humans throughout history. Long ago Socrates told the youth of Athens that an "unexamined life is not worth living." After some examination, the Nobel Prize winning Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote: "I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy." The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, on the other hand, seemed somewhat puzzled, and exclaimed, "Life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced." While an Indian mystic of recent vintage exclaimed, "Life is a jar of mixed pickles," Shakespeare gave vent to the meaninglessness of it all: "Life's . . . a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." (*Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 40.)

21. Have you ever been inclined to agree with any of these philosophers? As Christians, we believe that the only way to have true meaning in life is to have a relationship with Jesus Christ and to learn to live as He lived.
22. In this sermon, Christ was expecting Christians to live lives blessedly, responsibly, and lovingly.
23. As we suggested earlier, Matthew 5:1-12 is a call to the supreme happiness/blessedness found only in God's kingdom. At first glance, being meek, mourning, etc. does not seem like the path to happiness. But, a real Christian is meek and merciful, poor in spirit and pure in heart, mourns and thirsts, is a peacemaker, and is at the same time persecuted. But, in all of that, his relationship with God makes him happy. Consider the story of Polycarp's martyrdom; he prayed for other Christians as he was being prepared for execution.
24. Try to imagine yourself sitting among the crowd, listening to that sermon when it was first given. Would you have thought that any of the conditions described in the Beatitudes would make you happy? Remember that the Greek word, *makarios*, is sometimes translated "blessed" and sometimes translated "happy." As crazy as it might sound, those

who come to live by the Beatitudes as Jesus spoke them will have the happiest lives of all.

25. The Sermon on the Mount also calls us to live responsibly. Christians are to be not only the salt but also the light of the world. Think of what salt does. It accomplishes its work by completely immersing itself in its environment. Then, it cannot be seen, it can only be tasted. But, it affects everything around it. On the other hand, light must be seen in order to be of any value. It shines over everything and everyone around it. Christians are to be both salt and light.
26. In Matthew 5:17-42, Jesus used an interesting form of address to expand and emphasize the requirements of the moral law: "It was said ... but I say." Does that sound like He was trying to do away with the moral law? Not at all! In fact, He raised the standard set by the moral law to an even higher level. Much higher! To the point of loving one's enemies!
27. Read Matthew 5:38-48. Jesus called for Christians to live lovingly. Have you ever truly tried to "love your enemies"? "Do good to those who hate you"? And "pray for those who spitefully use you"? (Matthew 5:44) Is that a recipe for self-destruction? God never asks us to do anything which is not for our best good. Becoming more like Him is, in fact, the best thing we can possibly do for ourselves.
28. In concluding the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talked about several positives and several negatives:

The negative commands:

"Do not lay up...treasures on earth." (Matthew 6:19)

"Do not worry." (Matthew 6:25-32)

"Judge not." (Matthew 7:1-6)

The positive commands:

"Pray." (Matthew 6:5-13)

"Seek first the kingdom of God." (Matthew 5:33-34)

"Ask.... Seek.... Knock." (Matthew 7:7-12)

Build "on the rock." (Matthew 7:24-27)

29. What do you think these commands should mean to us? In this lesson, we have tried to briefly summarize the major points in the Sermon on the Mount. But, to try to summarize the Sermon on the Mount in a few words is like saying that the Pacific Ocean is a pool full of salty water!

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